THE NEW THEOLOGY

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

This book has been undertaken at the request of a number of my friends, who feel that recent criticisms of what has come to be called the New Theology ought to be dealt with in some comprehensive and systematic way. With this suggestion my own judgment concurs, but only so far as my own pulpit teaching is concerned. I cannot pretend to speak for any one else, and therefore this monograph must not be understood as an authoritative exposition of the views held and expounded by other preachers who may be in sympathy with the New Theology. From its very nature, as I hope the following pages will show, the New Theology cannot be a Creed, but its adherents have a common standpoint. My only reason for calling this book by that title is, that a considerable section of the public at present persists in regarding me as in a special way the exponent of it; indeed, from the correspondence which has been proceeding in the Press, it is evident that many people credit

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me with having invented both the name and the thing. It is of little use objecting to the name, for to all appearances it has come to stay, and is gradually acquiring a marked and definite content. So long as it is clearly understood that this book is but an outline statement of my own personal views, the title will do no harm. The controversy, which is not yet over, has been fruitful in misunderstandings of all kinds, and a great many of the criticisms passed upon my teaching have been wholly due to a mistaken notion of what it really is. In so far as any of those criticisms have been directed against me personally, I have nothing to say; I hope I can leave my vindication to the judgment of whatever public may feel an interest in my work. The best rejoinder that could be made to the various criticisms of the teaching itself would be to publish them side by side, for they neutralize one another most effectually. But a better and more useful thing to do is to let the public know just what the teaching is, and leave it to the test of time. I do not greatly object to having it described as "new." The fundamental principle of the New Theology is as old as religion, but I am quite willing to admit that in its all-round application to the

conditions of modern life it is new. I do not see why a man should be ashamed of confessing that he does his own thinking instead of letting other people do it for him.

This book, then, is not the author's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. It is intended as a concise statement of the outlines of the teaching given from the City Temple pulpit. It is neither a reply to separate criticisms, nor an *ex cathedra* utterance. I think I am usually able to say what I mean, and in the following pages my object is to say what I mean in such a way that every one can understand.

My thanks are due to the Rev. J. A. Hamilton, of Penzance, for kindly reading through the manuscript, and preparing it for the printer.

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THE NEW THEOLOGY

CHAPTER I

THE NAME AND THE SITUATION

RELIGION is one thing and theology another, but religion is never found apart from a theology of some kind, for theology is the intellectual articulation of religious experience. Every man who has anything worthy to be called a religious experience has also a theology; he cannot help it. No sooner does he attempt to understand and express his experience of the relations of God and the soul than he finds himself in possession of a theology. The religious experience may be a very good one and the theology a very bad one, but still religion and theology are necessary to each other, and it is a man's duty to try to make his theology as nearly as possible an adequate and worthy expression of his religion. He will never succeed in doing this in a permanent fashion, for the content of religious experience is, or should be, greater than any form of statement. But theology is every one's business. We cannot

Religion and theology.

afford to leave it to experts, or refrain from forming our own judgment upon the pronouncements of experts. To speak of theology as though it had an esoteric and an exoteric side, one for the man in the study and the other for the man in the world, is a practical heresy of a most dangerous kind. Neither should theology be confounded with ecclesiasticism. It is my conviction that the battle with ecclesiasticism has long since been decided, and civilization has nothing to fear from the official priest. Those who spend their time in protesting against sacerdotal pretensions are only beating the air. "We shall never go to Canossa," as Bismarck said. No; the real danger to spiritual religion, and therefore to the immediate future of mankind in every department of thought and action, arises from practical materialism on the one hand and an antiquated dogmatic theology on the other. I hope it will be understood by readers of these pages that in any reference I may make to dogmatic theology I am passing no reflection upon the scientific theologian, whose work is being done in the field of historical criticism or archæology, or any of the departments of scientific research into the subject-matter of religion. Most of my readers will understand quite well what I mean. Every one knows that, broadly speaking, certain ways of stating Christian truth are taken for granted both in pulpit and pew; the popular or generally accepted theology of all the Churches of Christendom, Catholic and

Protestant alike, is fundamentally the same, and somehow the modern mind has come to distrust it. There is a curious want of harmony between our ordinary views of life and our conventional religious beliefs. We live our lives upon one set of assumptions during six days of the week, and a quite different set on Sunday and in church. The average man feels this without, perhaps, quite realizing what is the matter. All he knows is that the propositions he has been taught to regard as a full and perfect statement of Christianity have little or nothing to do with his everyday experience; they seem to belong to a different world. He does not know how comparatively modern this popular presentation of Christianity is. What is wanted, therefore, is a restatement of the essential truth of the Christian religion in terms of the modern mind.

The New Theology and the immanence of God.

Where or when the name New Theology arose I do not know, but it has been in existence for at least one generation. It is neither of my invention nor of my choice. It has long been in use, both in this country and in America, to indicate the attitude of those who believe that the fundamentals of the Christian faith need to be rearticulated in terms of the immanence of God. Those who take this view do not hold that there is any need for a new religion, but that the forms in which the religion of Jesus is commonly presented are inadequate and misleading. What is wanted is freshness and simplicity

of statement. The New Theology is only new in the sense that it seeks to substitute simplicity for complexity, and to get down to moral values in its use of religious terms. Our objection is not so much to the venerable creeds of Christendom as to the ordinary interpretations of those creeds. And, creeds or no creeds, we hold that the religious experience which came to mankind in Jesus of Nazareth is enough for all our needs, and only requires to be freed from limiting statements in order to lay firm hold once more upon the civilized world.

The New Theology is an untrammelled return to the Christian sources in the light of modern thought. Its starting-point is a re-emphasis of the Christian belief in the Divine immanence in the universe and in mankind. This doctrine requires to be placed effectively in the foreground of Christian preaching. In the immediate past, the doctrine of the Divine transcendence—that is, the obvious truth that the infinite being of God must transcend the infinite universe—has been presented in such a way as to amount to a practical dualism, and to lead men to think of God as above and apart from His world instead of expressing Himself through His world. I repeat that this dualism is practical, not theoretical; but that it exists is plain enough from such statements as that of the present-day theologian who speaks of God's "eternal eminence, and His descent on a created world." This kind

of theologizing leads straight to the conclusion that God is, to all intents and purposes, quite distinct from His creation, although He possesses a full and accurate knowledge of all that goes on in it and reserves to Himself the right to interfere. In what sense language like this leaves room for the Divine immanence it is difficult to see. The New Theology holds that we know nothing, and can know nothing, of the Infinite Cause whence all things proceed, except as we read Him in His universe and in our own souls. It is the immanent God with whom we have to do, and if this obvious fact is once firmly grasped it will simplify all our religious conceptions and give us a working faith.

The decline of organized Christianity.

For a generation or more in every part of Christendom there has been a steady drift away from organized religion as represented by the Churches, and the question is being seriously asked whether Christianity can much longer hold its own. Protestant controversialists frequently draw attention to the decline of church-going in Latin countries as evidence of the decay of sacerdotalism, particularly in the Church of Rome. But outside Latin countries it is not one whit more noticeable in the Church of Rome than in any other Church. The masses of the people on the one hand, and the cultured classes on the other, are becoming increasingly alienated from the religion of the Churches. A London daily

paper made a religious census some years ago, and demonstrated that about one-fifth of the population of the metropolis attended public worship, and this was a generous estimate. Women, who are more emotional, more reverent, and more amenable to external authority than men, usually form the majority of the worshippers at an ordinary service. Mr. Charles Booth, in his great work on the "Life and Labour of the People in London," asserts that the Churches are practically without influence of any kind on the communal life. This I believe to be an exaggeration, but it will hardly be denied that the average working, business, or professional man looks upon the Churches almost with indifference. In many cases this indifference passes into hostility or contempt. Intelligent men take little notice of preachers and sermons, and the theologically-minded layman is such a rarity as to be noteworthy. Most significant of all, perhaps, is the fact that much of the moral earnestness of the nation and of social redemptive effort exist outside the Churches altogether. I am well aware that there is a great deal of snarling criticism of the Churches which springs from selfish materialism, and I gladly recognize that in almost any ordinary Church to-day brave and self-denying work is being done for the common good, but this does not invalidate my general statement. The plain, bald fact remains that the Churches, as such, are counting for less and less in civilization in

general and our own nation in particular. One of the ablest of our rising young members of Parliament, a man of strong religious convictions and social sympathies, recently declared that we were witnessing the melancholy spectacle of a whole civilization breaking away from the faith out of which it grew. To be sure, the same thing has been said before and has proved to be wrong. It was said in the eighteenth century, when men with something of the prophet's fire in them preached the gospel of the Rights of Man, declaring at the same time that institutional religion was at an end, utterly discredited, and impossible of acceptance by any intelligent being. In France during the Revolution the populace turned frantically upon the established faith, tore it to shreds, burlesqued it, and set up the worship of the goddess of Reason, as they called it, typified by a Parisian harlot. In England a devitalized Deism laid its chilly hand not only upon the world of scholars and men of letters, but even upon the Church. An English king is reported to have said that half his bishops were atheists. And yet somehow religion reasserted itself all over the civilized world. Napoleon, with shrewd insight, realized that the people could not do without it, and so effected the Concordat with Rome which has now been dissolved; Wesley began the movement in England which has since created the largest Protestant denomination in the world; Germany produced a succession of great preachers and scholars, the

like of whom had hardly ever been known in Europe before.

Will this happen again? For assuredly Christianity has, for the moment, lost its hold. Can it recover it? I am sure it can, if only because the moral movements of the age, such as the great Labour Movement, are in reality the expression of the Christian spirit, and only need to recognize themselves as such in order to become irresistible. The waggon of Socialism needs to be hitched to the star of religious faith. But have the Churches spiritual energy enough to recover their lost position? That depends upon themselves. If they consent to be bound by dogmatic statements inherited from the past, they are doomed. The world is not listening to theologians to-day. They have no message for it. They are on the periphery, not at the centre of things. The great rolling river of thought and action is passing them by. Scientific scholarship applied to the study of Christian origins is extremely valuable; but the defender of systems of belief couched in the language of a bygone age is an anachronism, and the sooner we shake ourselves free of him the better. The greatest of all the causes of the drift from the Churches is the fact that Christian truth has become associated in the popular mind with forms of statement which thoughtful men find it impossible to accept, not only on intellectual, but even on moral grounds. Certain

Will religious faith regain its power?

dogmatic beliefs, for example, about the Fall, the scriptural basis of revelation, the blood-atonement, the meaning of salvation, the punishment of sin, heaven and hell, are not only misleading but unethical. What sensible man really believes in these notions as popularly assumed and presented, and what have they to do with Christianity? They do not square with the facts of life, much less do they interpret life. They go straight in the teeth of the scientific method, which, even where the Christian facts are concerned, is the only method which carries weight with the modern mind. The consequence is, that religion has come to be thought of as something apart from ordinary everyday life—a matter of Churches, Creeds, and Bible-readings, instead of what it really is, the co-ordinating principle of all our activities. To put the matter in a nutshell—popular Christianity (or rather pulpit and theological college Christianity) does *not* interpret life. Consequently the great world of thought and action is ceasing to trouble about it.

One would think that the men whose business it is to teach religious truth would see this, and ask themselves the reason why. To an extent they do see it, but they never seem to think of blaming themselves for it except in a perfunctory kind of way. They talk about religious indifference, the need for better and more effective methods, and so on. The professional theologian rarely does even as much as this. He

Theologians and preachers rarely realize the situation.

takes himself very seriously; sniffs and sneers at any suggestion of deviation from the accepted standards; mounts some denominational chair or other and thunders forth his view of the urgent necessity for rehabilitating truth in the grave-clothes of long-buried formulas. I mean that the language he habitually uses implies some kind of belief in formulas he no longer holds. He hardly dares to disinter the formulas themselves—that would not be convenient even for him—but he goes on flapping the shroud as energetically as ever, and the world does not even take the trouble to laugh. Wherever and whenever religious agencies succeed, it is rarely because of the driving-power of what is preached, but because the preacher's gospel is glossed over or put in the background. We have popular services by the million, in which devices are used to attract the public which ought not to be necessary if their framers had any real message to declare. But they have not. Popular pulpit addresses rarely or never deal with the fundamental problems of life. The last thing one ever expects to hear in such addresses is a real living presentation of the beliefs the preacher professes to hold. He makes passing allusions to them, of course—such as appeals to come to the Cross, and such-like, but they generally sound unreal, and the pill has to be sweetly sugared. The ordinary way of preaching the gospel is to avoid saying much about what the preacher believes the gospel to be.

To be sure, there are many social activities in connection with Christian Churches. If it were not for these most of the Churches would have to be shut up. They are quite admirable in their way, and often produce excellent results, but they imply another gospel than the one supposed to be preached from the pulpits. They ignore dogmatic beliefs, and assume the salvability of the whole race, and the possibility of realizing the kingdom of God on earth. Wherever the Churches are alive to-day, and not merely struggling to keep their heads above water, it is not their doctrine but their non-theological human sympathy that is doing it.

This, then, is the situation. The main stream of modern life is passing organized religion by. Where is the remedy to be found?

Let me say plainly that I do not think our object should be to find a remedy which will save the Churches. That would be putting the cart before the horse. What is wanted is a driving force which will enable the Churches to fulfil their true mission of saving the world; or, to put it better still, will serve to bring mankind back to real living faith in God and the spiritual meaning of life. Hardly any one would seriously deny that the world is waiting for this. Men are not irreligious. On the contrary, there is no subject of such general interest as religion: it takes precedence of all other subjects, just because all other subjects are implied in it.

We seek to save religion rather than the Churches.

Religion is man's response to the call of the universe; it is the soul turning towards its source and goal. How could it fail to be of absorbing interest? What is wanted is a message charged with spiritual power: "Where there is no vision the people perish." Mere dogmatic assertions will not do. The word of God is to be known from the fact that it illuminates life, and appeals to the deepest and truest in the soul of man. That message is here now. It is being preached, not by one man only, but the wide world over. God has spoken, and woe betide the Churches if they will not hear. Religion is necessary to mankind, but Churches are not. From every quarter of Christendom a new spirit of hope and confidence is rising, born of a conviction that all that is human is the evidence of God, and that Jesus held the key to the riddle of existence. Although this comes to us as with the freshness of a new revelation, it is not really new. It is the spirit which has been the inspiration of every great religious awakening since the world began. In this country, and in other parts of the English-speaking world, that spirit is becoming associated with the name of the New Theology. To associate it with any one personality is to belittle the subject, and to obscure its real significance. There are many brave and good men in the Churches and outside the Churches to-day, men of true prophetic spirit, who would reject utterly the name New Theology, but who are thoroughly

imbued with this new-old spirit, and are leading mankind towards the light. In the Church of Rome the movement is typified by men like Father Tyrrell, whose teaching has led to his expulsion from the Jesuit Order, but not, so far, from the priesthood. The present condition of the Church of Rome is not unhopeful to those who believe, as I do, that that venerable Church has been used of God to great ends in the past, and that her spiritual vitality is by no means exhausted. Father Tyrrell, and such as he, are nearer in spirit to the New Theology men than are the latter to those Protestants who pin their faith to external standards of belief. It is a curious but indisputable fact that the most extreme anti-Romanist Protestants are themselves in the same boat with Rome; they insist on the absolute necessity for external authority in matters of belief, and are unwilling to trust the individual soul to recognize truth as it comes. In all the Churches those who believe in the religion of the Spirit should recognize one another as brothers. In the Church of England a large and increasing band of men are looking in this direction, and are making their influence felt. Of these, perhaps the most outstanding is Archdeacon Wilberforce, but he is by no means alone. A movement has begun in the Lutheran Church. It has existed for a long time in French Protestantism as represented by the late Auguste Sabatier and his friend Réville. In the Congregational and other Evangelical Churches

of England and America the same attitude is being taken by many who are not even aware that the name New Theology is being applied to it. In this country the movement in the Free Churches is typified by men like the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams of Bradford. There are many Unitarians who are preaching it; indeed, there are some who would assert that the New Theology is only Unitarianism under another name. But, as I shall hope to show, this is very far from being the case. It may or may not be professed by exponents of Unitarianism, but it is not a surrender to Unitarianism.

The New Theology is spiritual socialism,

The great social movement which is now taking place in every country of the civilized world towards universal peace and brotherhood, and a better and fairer distribution of wealth, is really the same movement as that which, in the more distinctively religious sphere, is coming to be called the New Theology. This fact needs to be realized and brought out. The New Theology is the gospel of the kingdom of God. Neither socialism nor any other economic system will permanently save and lift mankind without definitely recognized spiritual sanctions—that is, it must be a religion. The New Theology is but the religious articulation of the social movement. The word "theology" is almost a misnomer; it is essentially a moral and spiritual movement, the recognition that we are at the beginning of a great religious and ethical awakening, the

ultimate results of which no man can completely foresee.

Again, the New Theology is the religion of science. It is the denial that there is, or ever has been, or ever can be, any dissonance between science and religion; it is the recognition that upon the foundations laid by modern science a vaster and nobler fabric of faith is rising than that world has ever before known. Science is supplying the facts which the New Theology is weaving into the texture of religious experience.

and also the religion of science.

CHAPTER II

GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

All religion begins in cosmic emotion. It is the recognition of an essential relationship between the human soul and the great whole of things of which it is the outcome and expression. The mysterious universe is always calling, and, in some form or other, we are always answering. The artist answers by trying to express his feeling of its beauty; the scientist answers by recognizing its laws and unfolding its wonders; the social reformer answers by his self-denying labours for the common good. In each and every case there is in the background of experience a conviction that the unit is the instrument of the All; religion is implied in these and in all other activities in which man aims at a higher-than-self. But religion, properly so-called, begins when the soul consciously enters upon communion with this higher-than-self as with an all-comprehending intelligence; it is the soul instinctively turning towards that from whence it came. Religion may assume a great many different and even repellent forms, but at bottom this is what it always is; it is the soul reaching forth to

What religion is.

the great mysterious whole of things, the higher-than-self, and seeking for closer and ever closer communion therewith. The savage with his totem and the Christian saint before the altar have this in common; they are reaching through the things that are seen to the reality beyond.

But what name are we to give to this higher-than-self whose presence is so unescapable? The name matters comparatively little, but it includes all that the ordinary Christian means by God. The word "God" stands for many things, but to present-day thought it must stand for the un-caused Cause of all existence, the unitary principle implied in all multiplicity. Every one of necessity believes in this. It is impossible to define the term completely, for to define is necessarily to limit, and we are thinking of the illimitable. But we ought to understand clearly that to disbelieve in God is an impossibility; every one believes in God if he believes in his own existence. The blankest materialist that ever lived, whoever he may have been, must have affirmed God even in the act of denying Him. Professor Haeckel declares his belief in God on every page of his "Riddle of the Universe," the famous book in which he says that God, Freedom, and Immortality are the three great buttresses of superstition, which science must make it her business to destroy. So far science has only succeeded in giving us a vaster, grander conception of God, by giving us a vaster, grander conception of the universe in which we

What the word "God" means.

live. When I say God, I mean the mysterious Power which is finding expression in the universe, and which is present in every tiniest atom of the wondrous whole. I find that this Power is the one reality I cannot get away from, for, whatever else it may be, it is myself. Theologians will tell me that I have taken a prodigious leap in saying this; but I cannot help it. How can there be anything in the universe outside of God? Whatever distinctions of being there may be within the universe, it is surely clear that they must all be transcended and comprehended within infinity. There cannot be two infinities, nor can there be an infinite and also a finite beyond it. What infinity may be we have no means of knowing. Here the most devout Christian is just as much of an agnostic as Professor Huxley; we can predicate nothing with confidence concerning the all-comprehending unity wherein we live and move and have our being, save and except as we see it manifested in that part of our universe which lies open to us. One would think that this were so obvious as to need no demonstration. But how do ordinary church-going Christians talk about God? They talk as though He were (practically) a finite being, stationed somewhere above and beyond the universe, watching and worrying over other and lesser finite beings —to wit, ourselves. According to the received phraseology, this God is greatly bothered and thwarted by what men have been doing throughout the few millenniums of human existence. He takes the whole thing very seriously, and thinks

about little else than getting wayward humanity into line again. To this end He has adopted various expedients, the chief of which was the sending of His only-begotten Son to suffer and die in order that He might be free to forgive the trouble we had caused Him. I hope no reader of these words will think I am making light of a sacred subject; I never was more serious in my life. What I am trying to show is that, reduced to its simplest terms, the accepted theology of the Churches to-day is pitiably inadequate as an explanation of our relationship to this great and mysterious universe. There is a beautiful spiritual truth underneath every venerable article of the Christian faith, but as popularly presented this truth has become so distorted as to be falsehood. It narrows religion and belittles God. It is dishonouring to human nature, and is absolutely ludicrous as an interpretation of the cosmic process. Of course the dogmatic theologian will maintain that this is a caricature of the way in which the relationship of God to the world is set forth in religious treatises and from the Christian pulpit. But is it? I think I can appeal with confidence to the thoughtful man who has given up going to church as to whether it is or not. The God of the ordinary church-goer, and of the man who is supposed to teach him from study and pulpit, is an antiquated theologian who made His universe so badly that it went wrong in spite of Him, and has remained wrong ever since. Why He should ever have created it is not clear. Why

He should be the injured party in all the miseries that have ensued is still less clear. The poor crippled child who has been maimed by a falling rock, and the white-faced match-box maker who works eighteen hours out of the twenty-four to keep body and soul together, have surely some sort of a claim upon God, apart from being miserable sinners who must account themselves fortunate to be forgiven for Christ's sake. Faugh! it is all so unreal and so stupid. This kind of God is no God at all. The theologian may call Him infinite, but in practice He is finite. He may call Him a God of love, but in practice He is spiteful and silly. I shall have something to say presently about the twin problems of pain and evil; but what so-called orthodoxy has to say is not only no solution of them, it is demonstrably false to the religion of Jesus.

Every man believes in God.

For the moment, what I want to make clear is this: No man should refuse to assert his belief in God because he cannot bring himself to believe in the God of the typical theologian. Remember that the real God is the God expressed in the universe and in yourself. The question is not whether you *shall* believe in God, but how much you *can* believe about Him? You may think with Haeckel that the universe is the outcome of the fortuitous interaction of material forces, without consciousness and definite purpose behind them; or you may believe that the cosmos is the product of intelligence, and "means intensely and means

good," but you cannot help believing in God—the Power revealed in it. As I write these words I am seated before a window overlooking the heaving waste of waters on a rock-bound Cornish coast. It is a stormy day. The sky is overcast towards the western horizon; on the east, shafts of blue and saffron have pierced the pall of darkness and flung their radiance over the spreading sea. The total effect is strangely solemnizing. The suggestion of Titanic forces conveyed in the rush of wind and wave upon the unyielding cliffs, conjoined to the majestic march of the storm clouds across the heaven from the west, is somehow elevated and composed by the mystic light that streams from the east. I have never seen anything quite like it before. It tells me of a beneficent stillness, an eternal strength, far above and beyond these finite tossings. It whispers the word impossible to utter, the word that explains everything, the deep that calleth unto deep. So my God calls always to my deeper soul, and tells me I must read Him by mine own highest and best, and by the highest and best that the universe has yet produced. Thus the last word about God becomes the last word about man: it is Jesus. Materialists may tell me that the universe does not know what it is doing, that it goes on clanking and banging, age after age, without end or aim; but I shall continue to feel compelled to believe that the Power which produced Jesus must at least be equal to Jesus. So Jesus becomes

my gateway to the innermost of God. When I look at Him I say to myself, God is *that*, and, if I can only get down to the truth about myself, I shall find I am that too.

What does the universe mean?

But why is there a universe at all? Why has the unlimited become limited? What was the need for the long cosmic struggle, the ignorance and pain, the apparently prodigal waste of life and beauty? Why does a perfect form appear, only to be shattered and superseded by another? What can it all mean—if, indeed, it has a meaning? This is what thinkers have been asking themselves since thought began, and I have really nothing new to say about it. What I have to say leads back through Hegelianism to the old Greek thinkers, and beyond them again to the wise men who lived and taught in the East ages before Jesus was born. It is that this finite universe of ours is one means to the self-realization of the infinite. Supposing God to be the infinite consciousness, there are still possibilities to that consciousness which it can only know as it becomes limited. Any of my readers to whom this thought is unfamiliar, have only to look at their own experience in order to see how reasonable it is. You may know yourself to be a brave man, but you will know it in a higher way if you are a soldier facing the cannon's mouth; you will know it in a still different way if you have to face the hostility and prejudice of a whole community for standing by something which

you believe to be right. Perhaps you have a manly little son; he, like you, may believe in his sterling good qualities. But wait till he has gone out to fight his way in life; then you will realize what he is worth, and so will he. It is one thing to know that you are a lover of truth; it is another thing to realize it when your immediate interest and your immediate safety would bid you hedge and lie. Do not these facts of human nature and experience tell us something about God? To all eternity God is what He is, and never can be other; but it will take Him to all eternity to live out all that He is. In order to manifest even to Himself the possibilities of His being, God must limit that being. There is no other way in which the fullest self-realization can be attained. Thus we get two modes of God—the infinite, perfect, unconditioned, primordial being; and the finite, imperfect, conditioned, and limited being of which we are ourselves expressions. And yet these two are one, and the former is the guarantee that the latter shall not fail in the purpose for which it became limited. Thus, to the question, Why a finite universe? I should answer, Because God wants to express what He is. His achievement here is only one of an infinite number of possibilities.

> "God is the perfect Poet,
> Who in creation acts His own conceptions."

This is an end worthy alike of God and man. The act of creation is eternal, although the cosmos

is changing every moment, for God is ceaselessly uttering Himself through higher and ever higher forms of existence. We are helping him to do it when we are true to ourselves; or rather, which is the same thing, He is doing it in us: "The Father abiding in me doeth His works." No part of the universe has value in and for itself alone; it has value only as it expresses God. To see one form break up and another take its place is no calamity, however terrible it may seem, for it only means that the life contained in that form has gone back to the universal life, and will express itself again in some higher and better form. To think of God in this way is an inspiration and a help in the doing of the humblest tasks. It redeems life from the dominion of the sordid and commonplace. It supplies an incentive to endeavour, and fills the heart with hope and confidence. To put it in homely, everyday phraseology, God is getting at something, and we must help Him. We must be His eyes, and hands, and feet; we must be labourers together with Him. This fits in with what science has to say about the very constitution of the universe; it is all of a piece, there are no gaps anywhere. It is a Divine experiment without risk of failure, and we must interpret it in terms of our own highest.

CHAPTER III

MAN IN RELATION TO GOD

So far we have seen that the universe, including ourselves, is one instrument or vehicle of the self-expression of God. God is all; He is the universe, and infinitely more, but it is only as we read Him in the universe that we can know anything about Him. We have seen, too, that it is by means of the universe and His self-limitation therein that He expresses Himself to Himself. Now what is our relation to this process? What are we to think about ourselves? Who or what are we?

What is man?

A witty Frenchman once sardonically remarked, "In the beginning God created man in His own image, and man has ever since been returning the compliment by creating God in his." But what else can we do? It is surely evident, from what has already been said, that we know nothing and can know nothing of God except as we read Him in the universe, and we can only interpret the universe in terms of our own consciousness. In other words, man is a microcosm of the universe. What the universe may be in reality we do not know—though I am not so sure as

some people seem to be that appearance and reality do not correspond—we can only know it in so far as it produces sense images on our brain and enters into our individual consciousness. The limits of my subject forbid that I should enter into a discussion of philosophic idealism, but I think I ought to confess at once that I can only think of existence in terms of consciousness: nothing exists except in and for mind. The mind that thinks the universe must be immeasurably greater than my own, but in so far as I too am able to think the universe, mine is one with it. All thinking starts with a paradox, even the famous saying of Descartes, "I think, therefore I am;" and my paradox seems at least as reasonable as any other, and has fewer difficulties to encounter than most. I start, then, with the assumption that the universe is God's thought about Himself, and that in so far as I am able to think it along with Him, "I and my Father (even metaphysically speaking) are one." It cannot be demonstrated beyond dispute that any two human beings think the same universe. Strictly speaking, it is certain that they do not in every detail. But the common dominator of our experience, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, is the assumption that, in the main, the universe is pretty much the same for one man as it is for another. When I speak of the rolling sea, my neighbour does not understand me to mean the waving trees, but I cannot prove that he does not. If he is consistent in seeing water as trees

and trees as water, his mind must be constituted differently from mine, and yet I may never know it. So, by an almost unperceived act of faith, we have to take for granted that our separate individualities meet and become one to some extent in our common experience of this great universe, which is at that same time the expression of God. The real universe must be infinitely greater and more complex than the one which is apparent to our physical senses. This becomes probable, even on material grounds, the moment we begin to examine into the nature of sense perception. The ear is constituted to hear just so many sounds; beyond that limit at either end of the scale we can hear nothing, but that does not prove that there are no more sounds to hear. Similarly, the eye can distinguish five or seven primary colours and their various combinations; beyond that limit we are colour-blind. But suppose we were endowed to hear and see sounds and colours a million times greater in number than those of which we have at present any cognizance! What kind of a universe would it be then? But that universe exists now; it is around and within us; it is God's thought about Himself, infinite and eternal. It is only finite to a finite mind, and it is more than probable that spiritual beings exist with a range of consciousness far greater than our own, to whom the universe, of which we form a part, must seem far more beautiful and fuller of meaning than it seems to us. Imagine a man who could only see

grey hues, and could only hear the note A on the key-board. His experience would be quite as real as ours, and indeed the same up to a point; but how little he would know of the world as we know it. The glory of the sunset sky would be hidden from him; for him the melting power of the human voice, or of a grand cathedral organ, would not exist. So, no doubt, it is in a different degree with us all. The so-called material world is our consciousness of reality exercising itself along a strictly limited plane. We can know just as much as we are constituted to know and no more. But it is all a question of consciousness. The larger and fuller a consciousness becomes, the more it can grasp and hold of the consciousness of God, the fundamental reality of our being as of everything else.

The sub-conscious mind.

Of late years the comparatively new science of psychology has begun to throw an amount of valuable light upon the mystery of human personality. As the result of numerous experiments and investigations into the normal and abnormal working of the human mind, psychologists have discovered that a great deal of our ordinary mental action goes on without our being aware of it. This unconscious cerebration, as it is called, can hardly be seriously disputed, for every new addition to our psychological knowledge goes to confirm it. Hence we are hearing a great deal about the sub-conscious mind, or subliminal consciousness

as some prefer to call it. Now that our attention has been directed to it, we are coming to see, as is usual with every new discovery, that, after a fashion, we knew it all along. The sub-conscious mind seems to be the seat of inspiration and intuition. Genius, according to the late F. W. H. Myers, is "an uprush of subliminal faculty." We have all heard of the distinguished lady novelist who declares that when she has chosen her theme she is in the habit of committing it to her sub-conscious mind and letting it alone for awhile. She is not aware of any mental process which goes on, but sooner or later she finds that the theme is ripe for treatment; she knows what she thinks about it, and the work of stating it can profitably begin. Poets, preachers, and musicians can bear testimony of a somewhat similar kind. The thoughts which are most valuable are those which come unbidden, rising to the surface of consciousness from unknown depths. The best scientific discoveries are made in much the same way; the investigator has an intuition, and forthwith sets to work to justify it. Reason, by which we ordinarily mean the conscious exercise of the mental faculties, plods along as if on four feet; intuition soars on wings. Truly astonishing things are frequently done by the sub-conscious mind superseding and controlling the conscious mind in exceptional states of emotion, especially in the case of people who are not quite normal; but there is no one, however stolid and commonplace, who does not owe

far more to his subliminal consciousness than he does to what he calls his reason; indeed, reason has comparatively little to do with the way in which people ordinarily conduct themselves, although we may like to think otherwise.

Now, what is this sub-conscious mind, whose importance is so great, and of whose nature we know so little? That is a question upon which psychology has not yet pronounced, but there are not a few who regard it as the real personality. Evidently it is not only deeper, but larger than the surface mind which we call reason. Our discovery of its existence has taught us that our ordinary consciousness is but a tiny corner of our personality. It has been well described as an illuminated disc on a vast ocean of being; it is like an island in the Pacific, which is really the summit of a mountain whose base is miles below the surface. Summit and base are one, and yet no one realizes when standing on the little island that he is perched at the very top of a mountain peak. So it is with our every-day consciousness of ourselves; we find it rather difficult to realize that this consciousness is not all there is of us. And yet, when we come to examine into the facts, the conclusion seems irresistible that of our truer, deeper being we are quite unconscious.

Several important inferences follow from this position. The first is that our surface consciousness is somewhat illusory, and does not possess the sharpness and definiteness of outline which

we are accustomed to take for granted when thinking of ourselves. To ordinary common sense nothing seems more obvious than that we know most that is to be known about our friend, John Smith, with whom we used to go to school, and who has since developed into a stolid British man of business, with few ideas and a tendency towards conservatism. John is a stalwart, honest, commonplace kind of person, of whom brilliant things were never prophesied, and who has never been guilty of any. His wife and children go to church on Sundays. John seldom goes himself because it bores him, but he likes to know that religion is being attended to, and he does not want to hear that his clergyman is attempting any daring flights. He has a good-natured contempt for clergymen in general, because he feels somehow that, like women, they have to be treated with half-fictitious reverence, but that they do not count for much in the ordinary affairs of life; they are a sort of third sex. But, according to the newer psychology, this matter-of-fact Englishman is not what he seems even to himself. His true being is vastly greater than he knows, and vastly greater than the world will ever know. It belongs not to the material plane of existence, but to the plane of eternal reality. This larger self is, in all probability, a perfect and eternal spiritual being integral to the being of God. His surface self, his Philistine self, is the incarnation of some portion of that true eternal self which

The higher self.

is one with God. The dividing-line between the surface self and the other self is not the definite demarcation it appears to be. To the higher self it does not exist. To us it must seem that to all intents and purposes the two selves in a man are two separate beings; but that is not so: they are one, although the lower, owing to its limitations, cannot realize the fact. If my readers want to know whether I think that the higher self is conscious of the lower, I can only answer, "Yes, I do, but I cannot prove it; probabilities point that way." What I want to insist upon here is that we are greater than we seem, that we have a higher self, and that our limited consciousness does not involve a separate individuality.

> "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
> The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar.
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God who is our home."

The great poets are the best theologians after all, for they see the farthest. The true being is consciousness; the universe visible and invisible is consciousness. The higher self of the individual man enfolds more of the consciousness of God than the lower, but lower and higher are the same being. This may be a difficult thought to grasp, but the time is rapidly approaching

when it will be more generally accepted than it is now.

Another inference from the theory of the subconscious mind is that of the fundamental unity of the whole human race. Indeed, all life is fundamentally one, but there is a kinship of man with man which precedes that of man with any other order of being. Here again the spiritual truth cuts across what seem to be the dictates of common sense. Common sense assumes that I and Thou are eternally distinct, and that by no possibility can the territories of our respective beings ever become one. But even now, and on mere everyday grounds, we are finding reason to think otherwise. You are about to make an observation at table, and some other member of your family makes it before you; you are thinking of a certain tune, and some one begins to hum it; you have a certain purpose in mind, and lo, the same thought finds expression in some one else, despite all probabilities. "Oh," you may remark, "this is only thought-transference." Precisely; but what are you except your thought? All being, remember, is conscious of being. The Infinite Consciousness sees itself as a whole; the finite consciousness sees the same whole in part. Ultimately, your being and mine are one, and we shall come to know it. Individuality only has meaning in relation to the whole, and individual consciousness can only be fulfilled by expanding until it embraces the whole. Nothing that exists in

The unity of humanity.

your consciousness now and constitutes your self-knowledge will ever be obliterated, or ever can be; but in a higher state of existence you will realize it to be a part of the universal stock. I shall not cease to be I, nor you to be you; but there must be a region of experience where we shall find that you and I are one.

A third inference, already hinted at and presumed in all that has gone before, is that the highest of all selves, the ultimate Self of the universe, is God. The New Testament speaks of man as body, soul, and spirit. The body is the thought-form through which the individuality finds expression on our present limited plane; the soul is a man's consciousness of himself as apart from all the rest of existence, and even from God,—it is the bay seeing itself as the bay, and not as the ocean; the spirit is the true being thus limited and expressed,—it is the deathless Divine within us. The soul, therefore, is what we make it; the spirit we can neither make nor mar, for it is at once our being and God's. What we are here to do is to grow the soul, that is to manifest the true nature of the spirit, to build up that self-realization which is God's objective with the universe as a whole, and with every self-conscious unit in particular.

The Self is God.

Where, then, some one will say, is the dividing line between our being and God's? There is no dividing line except from our side. The ocean of consciousness knows that the bay has

never been separate from itself, although the bay is only conscious of the ocean on the outer side of its own being. But, the reader may protest, this is Pantheism. No, it is not. "Pantheism" is a technical term in philosophic parlance, and means something quite different from this. It stands for a Fate-God, a God imprisoned in His universe, a God who cannot help Himself, and does not even know what He is about, a blind force which here breaks out into a rock and there into Ruskin, and is equally indifferent to either. But that is not my God. My God is my deeper Self, and yours too; He is the Self of the universe, and knows all about it. He is never baffled, and cannot be baffled; the whole cosmic process is one long incarnation and uprising of the being of God from itself to itself. With Tennyson you can call this doctrine the Higher Pantheism, if you like; but it is the very antithesis of the Pantheism which has played such a part in the history of thought.

But, then, another will remonstrate, it does away with the freedom of the will. Well, here is a slippery subject, sure enough, and one upon which more nonsense has been talked, probably, than any other within the range of philosophical or theological discussion. Have I anything new to say about it? Probably not, but I think I can focus the issue and show what we must recognize in order to have a rational grasp of the subject. Thinkers have talked too much in the past about the separate

Its relation to free-will.

faculties of human nature, as though they could be divided into Reason, Feeling, Action, and so on. But they are beginning to talk differently now. They are coming to see that a human being cannot be cut up like that. The Reason is the whole man thinking, judging, comparing. Feeling accompanies Reason, and is never found apart from it; for reason implies consciousness, and without consciousness nothing that can properly be called Feeling exists. The will is simply the whole man acting.

Now, I will frankly confess that in strict logic I can find no place for the freedom of the will. I will defy any one to do so, if he knows much about the laws of thought. But, as the late Mr. Lecky said in his "Map of Life," and Mr. Mallock has since pointed out in "The Reconstruction of Belief," we are compelled to overleap logic when considering this matter. No argument will convince us that we have not some power of individual self-direction and self-control. The most thorough-going determinist that ever lived forgets his determinism even while he argues about it. It must be amusing, even to himself, to see how he enjoys scoring off his opponent, thus taking for granted in the heat of controversy the very freedom he sets out to deny. The assumption at the bottom of every vigorous argument is that the other party might have held other views, and ought to have held other views than those assailed. The position of the determinist in effect is this: You must believe you have no

freedom to choose anything, otherwise you are to blame for choosing wrongly. Of course, the consistent determinist would evade this *reductio ad absurdum* by saying that he is as much necessitated in blaming his opponent for holding wrong views as the opponent is for refusing to give them up. He might also tell me that I am arguing for free will in an obscurantist fashion by admitting at the outset that, in strict logic, I can find no place for it. But I am not arguing for free will at all. I am simply showing that by the very constitution of our minds we cannot avoid taking some measure of free will for granted. Even the determinist who scouts this view, and calls it absurd, is by his own action a convincing demonstration of its truth.

Only the Infinite has perfect freedom.

But this contention is something more than mere logic chopping. It points to a truth too high for a finite mind to grasp, namely, that whatever our moral freedom may be, it must consist with the all-directing universal will. There is no such thing as perfect freedom in a finite being. Perfect freedom belongs only to infinity; finiteness implies limitations. Popular theology usually assumes, or appears to assume, that every individual is a perfectly free agent, able at all times to distinguish and to choose between the higher and the lower, and as liable to choose the one as the other. There is another kind of theologizing, of course, which speaks of the weakened or corrupted will due to our fallen nature; that I

must let alone for the present. What I want to point out is, that there is not, and never has been, an act of the will in which a man, without bias in either direction, has deliberately chosen evil in the presence of good. Under such circumstances, no being in his sober senses would ever choose evil; enlightened self-interest alone would forbid the possibility of such a choice. Freedom of the will in this sense has never existed. The truth is, that we should not be conscious of the possession of a will, but for the conflict between desire and duty, or the necessity of choosing between one impulse and another. After all, the moral choices of life are but few in number. The things we go on doing day by day are the things that, for the most part, we know we must do, and we scarcely reflect upon the matter. When some question emerges which demands a moral choice, we know it at once by the fact that we have to take our limitations into account. Something has to be overcome if the higher is chosen, and, without that overcoming, there is no real assertion of the will. It is no heroism in me to avoid getting drunk; but it may mean a tremendous assertion of the moral reserves in some poor fellow who knows the power of the drink craving. The same observation holds good of all human life. My weak points are not my neighbour's, and his are not mine. Neither of us is in a position to estimate the other's strength of will; but we both know that in our own case an absolutely unfettered moral choice

has never been made. But for our limitations and imperfections, we should know nothing whatever of the choice between right and wrong. Free will, in the sense of unlimited freedom of choice, does not exist. The only freedom we possess is like that of a bird in a cage: we can choose between the higher and the lower standing ground, a choice called for by the very fact that we are in prison, but we cannot choose where the cage shall go.

No doubt these considerations will meet with the disapproval of some people who think themselves orthodox. They will object to being told that every man has a higher self than that of which he is immediately conscious; that, fundamentally, the individual is one with the whole race and with God; that no one possesses absolute free will. To them it may seem an absurdity to maintain these positions. But if they say so, they will convict themselves of absurdity, for, with the exception of the last, Christian doctrine already affirms them all of Jesus. According to the received theology, Jesus was God, and yet He did not possess the all-controlling consciousness of the universe. He was also man, and yet He was before all ages. All creation proceeds from and centres in Him, and yet He was able to limit Himself in such a degree as to be ignorant of much that was going on in His own universe. If so-called orthodoxy finds it no difficulty to assert these things as being true of Jesus, it will not find it easy to show good reason

why the same should not be true of all humanity. For the moment, I neither assert nor deny the uniqueness of Jesus. All I am concerned to show is, that if it is not intellectually *impossible* to affirm certain things about the consciousness of Jesus and the limitation of His true being in His earthly life, it is not impossible to affirm them of mankind.

Some of my critics have contended that this view of the relationship of man to God hails not from Palestine but from Oxford, and is an outcome of the philosophy of T. H. Green. But I think it can be shown that its pedigree is considerably longer than that. Whether it hails from Palestine or not, it is explicitly stated in the Fourth Gospel: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me." Those who object to my statement of the fundamental identity of God and man will have to explain away such passages as this, and there are plenty of them. But, it may be urged, this is meant to apply only to Jesus. That I do not believe; I think the exceedingly able writer of the Fourth Gospel knew better; but for the moment I will not contest the point. Granted that it does apply only to Jesus, what then? The very things

which the critics declare to be impossible of personality in general in relation to God, they are affirming already of at least one personality—that of Jesus. If Jesus was God and yet prayed to God, if His consciousness was finite and yet one with the infinite, it is clear that in this one instance the seemingly impossible was not impossible. Those who insist upon the fundamental distinction between human personality and the being of God are thus on the horns of a dilemma. Present-day orthodoxy cannot consistently attack this position. The only telling criticism that can be directed against it is that which proceeds from the side of scientific monism. A thorough-going monist might reasonably contend that, up to a certain point, I have been arguing for a monistic view of the universe, in company with practically the whole scientific world, and have then given the case away by admitting a certain amount of individual freedom. I confess it looks like it; I have had to face the antinomy. I see that there is no escape from the assertion of the fundamental unity of all existence; and yet by the very constitution of the human mind we are compelled to take for granted a certain amount of individual initiative and self-direction. I think of the human will much as I do about the mariner's compass. It is well known that the needle does not always point steadily and consistently to the pole; its tiny aberrations have to be taken into account. But these are no real hindrance to the sailing

of the ship, and the compass itself cannot run away.

Again, some of my friends have been pointing out that, while the New Theology regards all mankind as "Being of one substance with the Father," our consciousness of that being is our own. I freely admit this while maintaining that there is no substance but consciousness. What other kind of substance can there be? Therefore I hold that when our finite consciousness ceases to be finite, there will be no distinction whatever between ours and God's. The distinction between finite and infinite is not eternal. The being of God is a complex unity, containing within itself and harmonizing every form of self-consciousness that can possibly exist. No one need be afraid that in believing this he is assenting to the final obliteration of his own personality; if such obliteration were possible, our present personality could possess no permanent value even for God. No form of self-consciousness can ever perish. It completes itself in becoming infinite, but it cannot be destroyed.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF EVIL

BEFORE going on to say more about human personality, especially the personality of Jesus, it is requisite that we should determine our attitude towards a great question which in manifold forms has beset the human intellect ever since the dawn of history, namely, the problem of evil. It is still the fashion to declare this problem insoluble, but I have the audacity to believe that it is not so; mystery there may be, but it is not chiefly mystery. I will even go so far as to assert that the problem had been solved in human thought before Christianity began. What I have to say about it now is ancient thinking confirmed by present-day experience.

The problem not insoluble.

Evil is a negative, not a positive term. It denotes the absence rather than the presence of something. It is the perceived privation of good, the shadow where the light ought to be. "The devil is a vacuum," as a friend of mine once remarked to the no small bewilderment of a group of listeners, in whose imagination the devil was anything but a vacuum. Evil is not

an intruder in an otherwise perfect universe; finiteness presumes it. A thing is only seen to be evil when the capacity for good is present and unsatisfied. Evil is not a principle at war with good. Good is being, and evil is not-being. When consciousness of being seeks further expression, and finds itself hindered by its limitations, it becomes aware of evil.

A little reflection ought to convince any one that this is the true way to look at the question of evil. Instead of asking how evil came to be in the universe, we should recognize that nothing finite can exist without it. Infinity alone can know nothing of evil because its resources are illimitable, and—if I may be permitted the expression—every need is supplied before it can be felt. Evil and good are not like two armies in deadly conflict with each other for the possession of the city of God. We ought not to say that when one is in the other is out, but rather when one *is* the other is *not*. The very word good implies evil. One is positive and the other negative. Good only emerges in our experience in contrast with evil, and the ideal existence must be that in which good and evil are both transcended in the life eternal, when struggle and conflict are no more. In our present state of existence evil is necessary in order that we may know that there is such a thing as good, and therefore that we may realize the true nature of the life eternal. Look at that shadow on the pavement cast by the row of houses

between your vision and the rising sun. Until the sun made his presence felt you did not even know there was a shadow. Presently, as the light-giver climbs beyond and above this temporary barrier, you will watch the shadow shrink and disappear. Where has it gone? If it were an entity in itself it would have moved off somewhere else, but you are well aware that it has not done so, for it never had any real existence; real as it seemed, so real that you were able to give it a name, it never did more than show the place that needed to be filled with light. When the light came the shadow was swallowed up. So it is with every kind of evil, no matter what. Your perception of evil is the concomitant of your expanding finite consciousness of good. The moment you see a thing to be wrong you have affirmed that you know, however vaguely, what is required to put it right. Even when evil comes in the form of a calamity that lessens and diminishes your previous experience of good, as in an earthquake or a pestilence, this statement as to its true nature is in no way invalidated. It is not a thing in itself; it is only the perceived privation of what you know to be good, and which you know to be good because of the very presence of limitation, hindrance, and imperfection.

But to most minds evil is almost synonymous with pain; at any rate, in our experience it is associated with pain. When men begin questioning the goodness of God because of the evil of

the world, they usually mean the pain of the world. Perhaps their thought about sin is to some extent an exception; sin and pain are not necessarily immediately associated in the theological mind. But what is pain? Properly speaking, it is not in itself evil, but rather the evidence of evil, and also in a different way the evidence of good. Pain is life asserting itself against death, the higher struggling with the lower, the true with the false, the real with the unreal. When a baby cries for food, he does so in unconscious obedience to the law of life; a stone does not cry for food. When a strong man suffers in the grip of a fell disease, the life within him is fighting for expression against something that seems to be extinguishing it. The suffering is caused by the effort of the life to retain its hold on the form, and yet if the disease succeeds in breaking the form it has only released the life to find expression in some higher form. When a guilty man suffers the torture of remorse, it means that the truth within him is declaring itself against the falsehood, although it does not follow that it will immediately conquer. This is what pain is; it is life pressing upon death, and death resisting life. If a traveller falls asleep in the snow, or a sailor is nearly drowned, the process of recovery is always painful because the returning life has to overcome death. Carry the same principle through the whole range of human experience, physical, mental, and moral, and it

The relation of evil and pain.

will indicate the real significance of all the pain which has ever been endured or ever will be endured by mankind.

Still this would not satisfy every one who feels compassion for cosmic suffering. Professor Huxley has told us that there is no sadder story than the story of sentient life upon this planet, and in so saying he has the testimony of modern science behind him. A vast amount of attention has been directed to this phase of the subject within the past fifty years. We seem to be more sensitive to the presence of pain as well as more sympathetic than our fathers were, and this tendency shows itself in a recognition of the solidarity of humanity with the lower creation. Theology has had practically nothing to say about the suffering, or even about the significance of, the myriad forms of life which exist below the human scale. But why ought they to be ignored? Indeed, how can they be ignored? The theology that has nothing to say about my clever and loyal four-footed companion, with his magnanimity, his sensitive spirit, and even his moral qualities, omits something of considerable importance to a thorough and consistent world-view. "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father," said One who spake as never man spake. I think it was Schopenhauer who once remarked, "The more I see of human nature the more I respect my dog." Now, the New Theology finds no difficulty in recognizing the importance of the brute creation, for it

believes in a practical recognition of the solidarity of all existence. There is no life that is not of God, and therefore no life can ever perish, whatever may become of the form. If we can explain human suffering, the same explanation covers the suffering of all sub-human life.

The true extent of the problem of pain.

But the problem is not so large as it looks. When we hear of a terrible event like the Jamaica disaster, we are apt to jump to the conclusion that the amount of suffering in the world is specially and enormously greater because of it. But that is not so. Our standard of measurement is a false one. The amount of pain endured depends upon the consciousness enduring it, and upon its capacity for looking before and after. Besides, we only suffer individually, and therefore all the pain of the world is comprised within the experience of the being who suffers most, whoever that may be. We ought to estimate the actual amount of cosmic suffering by the intensity of the suffering borne by any one individual at any one time. We are not immediately conscious of all the woe of the universe; we are each of us conscious of our own, even though it may be caused by sympathy with others; and the world's woe, taken as a whole, is not greater than the amount borne by him whose consciousness of it is greatest. This is what we may call the intensive as contrasted with the extensive observation of the problem of pain. It is a kind of barometrical measurement. We do not gauge

the weather by adding together the figures of all the storm-glasses in the world; the rise or fall of the mercury in any one of them, especially the best one among them, comprehends the whole. Here is the problem of pain in a nutshell. The whole appalling tale of cosmic suffering can be compressed within the limits of the individual consciousness which has endured the most.

Nor is there the slightest need to be afraid of it. Theologians may tell us that we should never have known anything about it but for man's first disobedience; and humanists may maintain that it is impossible to reconcile it with belief in the goodness of God, but they are both wrong. There are some things impossible even to omnipotence, and one of them is the realization of a love which has never known pain. If creation is the self-expression of God, pain was inevitable from the first. For what is the nature of God? According to the Christian religion, it is love. And what is love? Here is another slippery word which has had some contradictory connotations in the course of its history. Some time ago, Mr. G. Bernard Shaw delivered a lecture at the City Temple on "The Religion of the British Empire," in the course of which he said that, if I knew as much about stage-plays as he did, I should distrust the word "love," for it was bound up with an amount of false and gusty sentiment. He himself preferred the word "life"

The purpose of pain.

to express what I meant by the word "love." But "love" is too good a word to be given over to the sentimentalists, although Mr. Shaw was perfectly right as to the way in which it has been misused. Love *is* life, the life eternal, the life of God. Jesus and His New Testament followers used both terms as expressive of the innermost of God. The life of God is such that, in the presence of need, it must give itself, just as water will run downhill; this is the law of its being. Where no need exists, that is where life is infinite, love finds no expression. To realize itself for what it is, sacrifice, that is self-limitation, becomes necessary. Love is essentially self-giving. It is the living of the individual life in terms of the whole. In a finite world this cannot but mean pain, but it is also self-fulfilment. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life shall find it." This profound saying of Jesus is older even than Jesus; it is the law of God's own being, the law of love, the means to the realization of the life eternal. It is so plain and simple, and withal so sublime, that we cannot but see it to be true, and can do no other than bow before it. The law of the universe is the law of sacrifice in order to self-manifestation. In this age-long process all sentient life has its part, for it is of the infinite and to the infinite it will return. When, therefore, you feel compassion for the rabbit which is being killed by the weasel, or the stag that falls before the hounds, you can remember at the

same time that this is not meaningless cruelty, but the operation of the same law that governs the highest activities of your own soul. You are right to feel the compassion; you were meant to feel it; and there is good reason why you should, for the suffering is real enough to awaken it. But do not forget that the suffering is not quite what it appears to you; it is only yours as it enters into your own consciousness and you suffer along with the actual victim. Compassion in such a case is the initial impulse towards self-offering, the desire to take the victim's place. But the suffering of the rabbit or the stag is to be measured by the consciousness of the rabbit or the stag, not by yours. In the slaughter nothing perishes but the form, the life returns to the Soul of the universe.

The nature of sin.

What, then, is sin? In the light of the foregoing considerations, that question should not be difficult to answer. Some of my recent critics have been declaring that I deny the existence of sin, and am teaching that, as there is no sin, there is no need for atonement. This looks like wilful misrepresentation, for my words on the subject have been clear enough and I have nothing to unsay; but perhaps it would be better to allow that the critics have made the mistake of rushing into print without carefully examining the utterances which they denounce. Let me say, then, that sin is the opposite of love. All possible activities of the soul are between two poles—self

on the one hand and the common life on the other. Everything we can think or say or do is in one or other of these directions; we are either living for the self at the expense of the whole, or we are fulfilling the self by serving the whole. Sin is, therefore, selfishness. If the true life is the life which is lived in terms of the whole, then the sinful life is the life which is lived for self alone. No man, however depraved, succeeds in living the selfish life all the time; if he did he would sink below the level of the brutes. Sin makes for death; love makes for life. Sin is selfward; love is allward. Sin is always a blunder; in the long run it becomes its own punishment, for it is the soul imposing fetters upon itself, which fetters must be broken by the reassertion of the universal life. Sin is actually a quest for life, but a quest which is pursued in the wrong way. The man who is living a selfish life must think, if he thinks about it at all, that he can gratify himself in that way —that is, he can get more abundant life. But in this he is mistaken; he is trying to cut himself off from the source of life. He is like a man seated on the branch of a tree and sawing it off from the trunk. But when theologians talk of the wrath of God against sin, and the wrong which sin has inflicted upon God, they employ figures of speech which are distinctly misleading. In fact, they do not seem to have a clear idea as to what sin really is. They use vague language about it, as though it were some kind of corporate

offence against God of which the whole race has been guilty without being able to help it, and which no individual can escape, although he is as much to blame as if he could. But sin has never injured God except through man. It is the God within who is injured by it rather than the God without. It is time we had done with the unreal language about the Judge on the great white throne, whose justice must be satisfied before his mercy can operate. The figure contains a truth which every one knows well enough, but it is not easy to recognize it under this form.

The theological muddle is largely caused by the inability of many people to free themselves from archaic notions which have really nothing to do with Christianity, although they have been imported into it. The principal of these, in relation to the question of sin, is the doctrine of the Fall. This doctrine has played a mischievous part in Christian thought, more especially, perhaps, since the Reformation. In broad outline it is as follows: Man was created originally innocent and pure—for what reason is not quite clear, but it is said to be for the glory of God—but by an act of disobedience to a Divine command he fell from his high estate, and in his fall dragged down the whole creation and blighted posterity. Things have been wrong ever since, and God has been angry not only with the original transgressor, but with all his descendants. God is a God of righteousness, and therefore in a future world

The Fall.

He will torture every human being who dies without availing himself of a certain "plan of salvation" designed to give him a chance of escape. This is a queer sort of righteousness! The plan of salvation consists in sending His own Son—a Son who has existed eternally, which the rest of us have not—to live a few years on earth and go through a certain programme, ending with a violent death. In consideration of this death, God undertakes to forgive His erring children, who could not help being sinners, and yet are just as much to blame as if they could, but only on consideration that they "believe" in time to flee from the wrath to come. If they happen to be half a minute too late, repentance will be of no avail.

Dogmatic theologians must really excuse me for paraphrasing their words in this way. I know they do not put the case with such irritating clearness, but this is what they mean. Their forefathers used to put it plainly enough. Turn up John Knox's "Confession of Faith," for instance, and it will be found that my statement of the case is mildness itself compared to his; John saw no necessity for mincing matters. It may be contended that no orthodox theologian of any repute now believes in an actual historical fall of the race. Perhaps not, but theological writers go on using language which implies it, and so do preachers of the gospel. I do not mean that they are dishonest, but they cannot get their perspective right. They think that by

giving up belief in some kind of a fall of the race they would have to give up a great deal more. Without the Fall they do not know what to say about sin, salvation, the Atonement, etc. They are mistaken in this supposition, as I trust I have already shown to some extent when discussing the question of sin, and as I shall hope to show more clearly still when we come to deal with the Atonement. What I now wish to insist upon is that it is absolutely impossible for any intelligent man to continue to believe in the Fall as it is literally understood and taught.

It is popularly supposed that the doctrine is derived from the Book of Genesis, but that is hardly the case. No doubt the Genesis myth about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden forms the background of it, but it is not consonant with the doctrine itself. The Genesis narrative says nothing about the ruined creation or the curse upon posterity. There is no hint of individual immortality, much less of heaven and hell; no Christ, no cross, no future judgment, no vicarious atonement. It is a composite, primitive story. A careful examination of its constituents will show that more than one account of the event has been drawn upon to supply materials for the narrative as it now stands. The legend was in existence as oral tradition ages before it became literature. How old it may be we have no means of knowing with certainty, but the parallel stories in other Semitic religions are of great antiquity, and had

originally no ethical significance whatever. The Genesis story of the Fall exercised no influence upon Old Testament religion; it is scarcely alluded to in the best Old Testament writings, some of them earlier probably than the Genesis account itself. It was not until after the great captivity that it showed any tendency towards becoming an article of faith. At the time when Jesus was born it had passed into the popular Jewish religion. There is a psychological reason for the gradual transformation of a primitive legend into a religious dogma. The Jewish nation has fallen upon evil days. For generations after the great captivity they had been ground under the heel of a succession of foreign masters. Under the cruel rule of Antiochus Epiphanes, about the middle of the second century B.C., their very religion seemed likely to be crushed out by merciless persecution. It was no wonder that the serious minds of the day became inclined to look upon the present as being but the ruin of the past, the sorry remainder of what had once been an ideal world. This tendency showed itself in various ways, the chief of which was a looking back to the great days of David and Solomon as the period of Israel's brightest splendour and prosperity. Of this I must say a little more presently, when we come to consider the genesis of the idea of the Kingdom of God. Another way in which the same tendency showed itself was that of taking the legend of the Fall more or less literally. A

suffering generation could hardly help thinking of their woes as being the result of some primitive act of transgression. This is the way in which the rabbis came to speak of the Fall as being an actual fact of religious and ethical importance.

A similar set of political and social conditions carried the doctrine over into Christianity, chiefly through the influence of the Apostle Paul, who had received a rabbinical training. Not only Hebrews but Greeks had begun to feel that the world was decaying, and perhaps nearing the end. They idealized the past and contrasted it with the present. All civilization lay under the dominion of Rome, and Rome herself was subject to a military dictator. The heart of the world-wide empire was a hot-bed of corruption where every form of vice took root and flourished. The Greek thinkers and scholars despised their masters, but their own heroic days were gone and they were helpless to cast off the yoke. They had no Pericles now, no Leonidas, no Miltiades. Gone were the men of Thermopylae, Marathon, and Salamis. These were lesser, darker days. With a sure instinct men were ceasing to feel any confidence in the future of this pagan civilization. It had its great elements, but the signs of disruption were already apparent, and no one could foresee what would take its place. The mood of the time is reflected in the pages of Tacitus and Juvenal. Into this

The doctrine transferred to Christianity.

atmosphere came Christianity with its doctrine of the holy love of God, and its adoring faith in Jesus. But both Judaism and Hellenism had already the tendency to look back towards a better and happier time, and to think of the present as a fall from it. Paul felt this like every one else, and forthwith took some kind of a fall for granted when unfolding his system of thought. It is doubtful whether he took the Genesis story literally or not, and he certainly made Adam the type of the unideal or earthly man who had become estranged from God. He was too great a man to be pinned down to mere literalism in a question of this kind, so in his use of the terms supplied by the rabbinical version of the legend he glides easily into the statement of the obvious truth that the Adam, or lower man, or earthly principle in every human being, needs to be transformed by the uprising of the Christ, or ideal man, within the soul. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." "The first man is of the earth earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven."

Here, then, we have the origins of the doctrine of the Fall. Right through Christian history the tendency has run to look upon the world as the ruins of a Divine plan marred by man's perversity and self-will. It is time we got rid of it, for it has had a blighting, deadening influence upon hopeful endeavour for the good of the race. It is not integral to Christianity, for Jesus never

said a word about it, and did not even allude to it indirectly. It implies a view of the nature and dealings of God with men which is unethical and untrue. Surely, if God knew beforehand that the world would go wrong, the blame for the catastrophe was not all man's. If He were so baffled and horror-stricken by the results as the dogmatic theologian makes out, He ought to have been more careful about the way He did His work at the beginning; a world which went wrong so early and so easily was anything but "very good," although He pronounced it to be so, according to the Genesis writer. Besides, why should a trivial act of transgression have sent it all wrong? We take leave of our common sense when we talk—

> "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree."

To be sure, Milton did not believe it himself when he wrote that line, but his Puritan associates and Catholic ancestors did, and orthodoxy professes to do so still, though it does not know quite how to put it without falling into absurdity. Again, why should God feel Himself so much aggrieved by Adam's peccadillo? If it were not for the theological atmosphere which surrounds the question, we should see at once that it was ridiculous. Why should the consequences continue through countless generations? Remember, this was supposed to be the very start of humanity's career. What a dreary, hopeless

outlook was left to it! The notion is incredible, and most of the clear-headed men who hold it would scout it without discussion if they heard of it now for the first time. As it is, however, they go on talking of the "awful holiness" of God, the offence against the Divine majesty, and so on. But what is this Divine holiness? I can well remember that as a child I used to tremble at the thought of it, for somehow, like a good many other people, I had been taught to think of the Divine holiness as synonymous with merciless inflexibility. But holiness, righteousness, justice, mercy, love, are but different expressions of the same spiritual reality. One might go on multiplying these considerations for ever, but there is no need to do so. Sufficient has been said to demonstrate the fact that the doctrine of the Fall is an absurdity from the point of view both of ethical consistency and common sense.

After this it is almost superfluous to point out that modern science knows nothing of it, and can find no trace of such a cataclysm in human history. On the contrary, it asserts that there has been a gradual and unmistakable rise; the law of evolution governs human affairs just as it does every other part of the cosmic process. This statement is quite consistent with the admission that there have been periods of retrogression as well as of advance, and that the advance itself has not been steady and uniform from first to last; there have been long stretches of history during which humanity has seemed

to mark time, and then a sudden outburst of intellectual activity and moral achievement. It could hardly be maintained, for instance, that the Athens of Socrates was not superior to the France of Fulk the Black of Anjou; or that the Assyria of Asshur-bani-pal was not quite as civilized as the Germany of the ninth century A.D. Alfred Russel Wallace has shown in his popular book, "The Wonderful Century," that the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a greater advance in man's power over nature than the fifteen hundred years preceding it. There are some people who maintain that while the material advance is unquestionable, the intellectual advance is, on the whole, more doubtful; and that, morally speaking, human nature is no different from what it ever was. But I do not think any serious historian would say this. Intellectually, the average man may still be inferior to Plato—though even Plato did not understand the need for exact thought as modern philosophers do—but civilization, as a whole, has produced a higher level of intellectual attainment than had been reached by Plato's world. A civilization in which four-fifths of the people were helots, kept in ignorance in order that an aristocratic few might enjoy the benefits of culture, was not equal to ours, great and glaring as the defects of ours may be. Again, while it is only too sadly true that modern civilization contains plenty of callous selfishness, gross injustice, and abominable cruelty, it can

hardly be denied that these relics of our brute ancestry are universally deplored, and that society recognizes them to be inimical to its well-being, and seeks to get rid of them. Thank God, as Anthony Trollope said, that bad as men are to-day, they are not as men were in the days of the Cæsars. If the New Theology controversy had arisen a few hundred years ago, theological disputants would not have wasted time in writing newspaper articles; they would have met in solemn conclave and condemned the heretic to be flayed alive, or hung over a slow fire, or treated in some similarly convincing manner. Of course it is remotely possible that some of them would like to do it now, but public opinion would not let them; things have changed and the change is in the direction of a higher general morality. If any man feels pessimistic about the present, let him study the past and he will feel reassured. Those who maintain that society is not morally better, but only more sentimental, beg the question. What they call sentimentalism is greater sensibility, greater sympathy, a keener sense of justice. What is the moral ideal but love? Every advance in the direction of universal love and brotherhood is a moral advance. The sternness of Stoicism or Puritanism was an imperfect morality. The grandeur and impressiveness of it were due to the fact that Stoics and Puritans, for the most part, took their ideal seriously; they aimed at something high and dedicated their lives to it. This dedication of

the life to something higher than self-interest is of the very essence of true morality, and its highest reach is perfect love. We are a long way from that yet, although the ideal was manifested two thousand years ago. The average man to-day is certainly not nobler than the Apostle Paul, nor does he see more deeply into the true meaning of life than did John the divine, but the general level is higher. Slowly, very slowly, with every now and then a depressing set-back, the race is climbing the steep ascent towards the ideal of universal brotherhood.

It is sometimes maintained by thinkers who account themselves progressive, that the law of evolution holds good of mankind, so far as our physical constitution is concerned, but that a special act of creation took place as soon as the physical frame was sufficiently developed to become the receptacle of a higher principle, and that then, and not till then, "man became a living soul." But it is impossible to square the circle in this way, and to contrive to get the doctrine of the Fall in by the back door, so to speak. The idea in the minds of those who hold this view appears to be that the tenant of the body which had been so long in preparation was a simple but intelligent and morally innocent personality, who forthwith proceeded to do all that Adam is credited with, and therefore spoiled what would otherwise have been a harmonious and orderly development; what we now see is not evolution as God meant it, but evolution perverted by

human wrong-headedness. But this theory contains more difficulties than the older one it aims to replace. It makes God even more incompetent than the traditional view does. For untold ages, apparently, He has been preparing the world for the advent of humanity, only to find that the moment humanity enters it the whole scheme is spoiled. But we need not seriously consider this view; the facts are overwhelmingly against it. The history, even of the most recent civilizations, is, comparatively speaking, only as old as yesterday; whereas the presence of human life on this planet is traceable into the almost illimitable past. But the farther we go back in our investigation of human origins, the less possible does it appear that the primitive man of theological tradition has ever lived. The Adam of the dogmatic theologian is like the economic man of the older school of writers on political science—the man who always wants to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest, and whose one consistent endeavour is to seek pleasure and avoid pain; he has never existed.

Besides, we do not want him to exist. The Fall theory is not only impossible in face of the findings of modern science, it is a real hindrance to religion. So far from having to give it up because science would have nothing to say to it, the difficulty would be to retain it and yet have anything like a rational view of the relation of God and the world. It has already been stated that the

Divine immanence and the Fall.

starting-point of the New Theology is a recognition of the truth that God is expressing Himself through His world. This truth occupied a place in religious thought ages before modern science was thought of; science has confirmed it, but has not compelled us to think it. If science had never existed, it would still remain the only reasonable ground for an adequate explanation of the relation of man to the universe. It simplifies all our questionings and co-ordinates all our activities. There is not a single one in the whole vast range of human interests which it does not cover. There is nothing which humanity can do or seek to do which is not immediately dependent upon it. The grandest task and the lowliest are both implied in it. It declares the common basis of religion and morality. Religion is the response of human nature to the whole of things considered as an order; morality is the living of the individual life in such a way as to be and do the most for humanity as a whole, it is making the most of one's self for the sake of the whole. Morality is not self-immolation. To jump off London Bridge would be self-immolation, but it would not be an act conducive to the welfare of the community; it might, indeed, be a very selfish and cowardly act. True morality involves the duty of self-formation and the exercise of judgment and self-discipline, in order that the individual life may become as great a gift as possible to the common life. It will therefore be seen at once that there is a vital relation between morality and religion;

the one implies the other, even though the fact may not always be recognized, and both are based upon the immanence of God.

The truth beneath the doctrine of the Fall.

But never yet has a particular doctrine or mode of stating truth held its own for any length of time in human history, unless there was some genuine truth beneath it, and the doctrine of the Fall is no exception. It does contain a truth—a truth which can be stated in a few words, and which might be inferred from what has already been said about the relationship of man and God. The coming of a finite creation into being is itself of the nature of a fall—a coming down from perfection to imperfection. We have seen the reason for that coming down; it is that the universal life may realize its own nature by attenuating or limiting its perfection. If I want to understand the composition of the ordinary pure-white ray, I take a prism and break it up into its constituents. This is just what God has been doing in creation. Our present consciousness of ourselves and of the world can reasonably be accounted a fall, for we came from the infinite and unto the infinite perfection we shall in the end return. I do not mean that our present consciousness of ourselves is eternal; I only assert that our true being is eternally one with the being of God, and that to be separated from a full knowledge of that truth is to have undergone a fall. But this fall has no sinister antecedents; its purpose is good, and there is nothing to mourn over except our own

slowness at getting into line with the cosmic purpose. Another way of describing it would be to call it the incarnation of God in nature and man, a subject about which I must say more in another chapter. This view of the meaning and significance of the Fall can be traced in all great religious literature. Perhaps one of the best statements of it that has ever been made is the one set forth by Paul of Tarsus in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Passages like this make it impossible to believe that Paul was ever really tied down to the literal rabbinical view of Adam's transgression and its consequences; and these words are a clear statement of the truth that the imperfection of the finite creation is not man's fault but God's will, and is a means towards a great end.

CHAPTER V

JESUS THE DIVINE MAN

ALL that has been said hitherto is but a preparation for the discussion of the greatest subject that at present occupies the field of faith and morals—that of the personality of Jesus and His significance for mankind. It has been repeatedly pointed out, both by friends and foes of the New Theology, that the ultimate question for the Christian religion is that of the place occupied by its Founder. Who or what was Jesus? How much can we really know about Him? What value does He possess for the religious consciousness to-day? All other questions about the Christian religion are of minor importance compared with these, and if we are prepared with an answer to these, we have by implication answered all the rest. Christianity is in a special sense immediately dependent upon its Founder. No other religion has ever regarded its founder as Christians regard their Master. Christianity draws its sustenance from the belief that Jesus is still alive and impacting Himself upon the world through His followers. Other great religions

The centrality of Jesus.

trace their origin to the teaching and example of some exceptional person; Christianity does the same, but with the added conviction that Jesus is as much in the world as ever, and that His presence is realized in the mystic union between Himself and those who know and love Him. If this be true, it is a fact of the very highest importance, and one which can neither be passed over nor relegated to a subordinate position. Christianity without Jesus is the world without the sun. If, as I readily admit, the great question for religion in the immediate future is that of the person of Jesus, the sooner we address ourselves to it the better.

Before discussing what theology has to say of Him, let us note in general terms what the civilized world is saying, theology or no theology. I suppose the most out-and-out materialist would admit that in the Western world the name of Jesus exercises an influence to which no other is even remotely comparable. Perhaps he would even go so far as to admit that there is no name anywhere which means so much to those who hear it. It is not merely that the strongest civilization on earth reverences that name, but that there is no other civilization which can produce a parallel to it. The nearest approach to it is that of Gautama, and I think it would be generally admitted that the influence even of this mighty and beautiful spirit has never possessed the immediacy, intensity, and personal value which distinguish that of Jesus. It might be

maintained, with some show of reason, that the civilization of Christendom, although it is now being copied by non-Christian communities, such as Japan, is not necessarily the highest because it happens to be the strongest, and that it is even regarded with contempt by the best representatives of some more ancient faiths. Still, that is not quite the point. The point is that the name of Jesus, which stands for a moral ideal which is the very negation of materialism, commands a reverence, and indeed a worship, the like of which no other has ever received in the history of mankind. It is no use trying to place Jesus in a row along with other religious masters. He is first and the rest nowhere; we have no category for Him. I am not trying to prove the impossible, namely, that Christianity is the only true religion and the rest are all false. We shall get on better when that kind of nonsense ceases to be spoken. All I am concerned to emphasize is that somehow Jesus seems to sum up and focus the religious ideal for mankind. His influence for good is greater than that of all the masters of men put together, and still goes on increasing. It is a notable fact that although Churches and Creeds are losing their hold upon the modern mind, the name of Jesus is held in greater regard than ever. We have heard of a meeting of workmen cheering Jesus and hissing the Churches. In our day, most people are agreed that in Jesus we have the most perfect life ever exhibited to humanity. It

is not only Christians who take this view; every one, or nearly every one, does so. Some years ago a book was published which bore on the title-page the question, "What would Jesus do?" The book was not very well written, and I do not think the writer would have claimed that it contained anything original; but it had an enormous sale, simply because of its attempt to answer the question on the covers. The most unlikely people bought and read it, people who never went to church and would not dream of doing so. From indications such as these one is justified in asserting that our Western civilization has accepted as true that, no matter who Jesus was, His character represents the highest standard for human attainment. In seeking moral excellence, the individual and the race are thus moving towards an ideal already manifested in history. The most effective taunt that can be levelled at inconsistent Christians is that they are unlike their Master. Criticisms of the character of Jesus are now few in number, and usually take the form of declaring that it is impracticable or impossible, not that it is undesirable or imperfect. Some, no doubt, would maintain that perhaps the real Jesus did not answer to the ideal which Christians have formed of Him; but that is another question. Here we are now face to face with the unescapable fact that the greatest moral and religious force in the world is embodied in the name of Jesus, and this by general consent.

But what has traditional Christian theology to say about Jesus? Here we enter a region in which the ordinary man of the world does not live, and is never likely to live, but we cannot afford to ignore it. According to the received theology, Jesus was and is God and man in a sense in which no one else ever has been or ever will be. As the Shorter Catechism has it, following the language of the ancient Creeds: "There are three persons in one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory," and Jesus is the second of the three. This kind of statement cannot but be confusing to the ordinary mind of to-day, if only because the word "person" does not mean to us quite the same thing that it meant to the framers of the ancient Creeds. Strange as it may seem to some of my readers, I believe what the creeds say about the person of Jesus, but I believe it in a way that puts no gulf between Him and the rest of the human race. This I trust will become clearer as we proceed; it seems to me to be implied in any real belief concerning the immanence of God. I think even the Athanasian Creed is a magnificent piece of work, if only the Churches would consent to understand it in terms of the oldest theology of all! But, according to conventional theology, the second person in the Trinity, who was co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father, laid aside His glory, became incarnate for our salvation, was born of a virgin, lived a brief, suffering life, wrought many

The Jesus of traditional theology.

miracles, died a shameful death, rose again from the tomb on the second morning after He had been laid in it, and ascended into heaven in full view of His wondering disciples. In fulfilment of a promise made by Him shortly before the Crucifixion, and repeated before the Ascension, He and the Father conjointly sent the third person in the Trinity to endue with power from on high the simple men whose duty it now became to proclaim the gospel of salvation to the world. Jesus is now on the throne of His glory, but sooner or later He will come again to wind up the present dispensation and to be the Judge of the quick and the dead at a grand assize.

There is a sense in which all this is true, but it is commonly expressed in such a way that the truth is lost sight of. Literally understood, it is incredible. The only way to get at the truth in every one of these venerable articles of the Christian faith will be to shed the husk, and that we must do without hesitation or compromise. A more accurate historic perspective would save us from the crudities so often preached from the pulpits in the name of Christian truth, crudities which repel so many intelligent men from the benefits of public worship. There never has been the slightest need for any man of thoughtful mind and reverent spirit to recoil from the fundamentals of the Christian Creed. Rightly understood, they are the fundamentals of human nature itself.

The first in order of thought is that of the Godhead of Jesus. As regards this tenet, I think it should be easily possible to show that the most convinced adherent of the traditional theology does not believe, and never has believed, what he professes to hold. The terms with which we have to deal are Deity, Divinity, and humanity. A good deal of confusion exists concerning the inter-relation of these three. It is supposed that humanity and Divinity are mutually exclusive, and that Divinity and Deity must necessarily mean exactly the same thing. But this is not so. It follows from the first principle of the New Theology that all the three are fundamentally and essentially one, but in scope and extent they are different. By the Deity we mean—and I suppose every one means—the all-controlling consciousness of the universe, as well as the infinite, unfathomable, and unknowable abyss of being beyond. By Divinity we mean the essence of the nature of the immanent God, the innermost and all-determining quality of that nature; we have already seen that, according to the Christian religion, the innermost quality of the Divine nature is perfect love. Show us perfect love, and you have shown us the divinest thing the universe can produce, whether it knows itself to be immediately directed and controlled by the infinite consciousness of Deity, or whether it does not. It is clear, then, that although Deity and Divinity are essentially one, the latter is the lesser term, and is dependent

Godhead and manhood.

for its validity upon the former. Humanity is a lesser term still. It stands for that expression of the Divine nature which we associate with our limited human consciousness. Strictly speaking, the human and Divine are two categories which shade into and imply each other; humanity is Divinity viewed from below, Divinity is humanity viewed from above. If any human being could succeed in living a life of perfect love—that is, a life whose energies were directed towards impersonal ends, and which was lived in such a way as to be and do the utmost for the whole—he would show himself Divine, for he would have revealed the innermost of God.

Now let us apply these definitions to the personality of Jesus. Granted that the devotion of Christians has been right in recognizing in Him the one perfect human life, that is, the one life which consistently and from first to last was lived in terms of the whole, what are we to call it except Divine? In a sense, of course, everything that exists is Divine, because the whole universe is an expression of the being of God. But it can hardly be seriously contended that a crocodile is as much an expression of God as General Booth. It is wise and right, therefore, to restrict the word "Divine" to the kind of consciousness which knows itself to be, and rejoices to be, the expression of a love which is a consistent self-giving to the universal life. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." General Booth is Divine

in so far as this is the governing principle of his life. Jesus was Divine simply and solely because His life was never governed by any other principle. We do not need to talk of two natures in Him, or to think of a mysterious dividing line, on one side of which He was human, and on the other Divine. In Him humanity was Divinity, and Divinity humanity. Does any one think that this brings Jesus down to our level? Assuredly it does not; we are far too prone to be ruled by names. To the ordinary Christian this explanation of the Divinity of Jesus may seem equivalent to the denial of His uniqueness, but it is nothing of the kind. I have already devoted some little space to emphasizing the obvious fact that it is impossible to deny the uniqueness of Jesus; history has settled that question for us. If all the theologians and materialists put together were to set to work to-morrow to try to show that Jesus was just like other people, they would not succeed, for the civilized world has already made up its mind on that point, and by a right instinct recognizes Jesus as the unique standard of human excellence. But this is not to say that we shall never reach that standard too; quite the contrary. We must reach it in order to fulfil our destiny, and to crown and complete His work. To stop short of manifesting the perfect love of God would be to fail of the object for which we are here, and to render the advent of Jesus useless. Christendom already knows this perfectly well, although it has not always succeeded in

expressing it with perfect clearness. "Beloved, now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He (or rather it) shall appear, we shall be like Him." In our practical religion we all, even the most reactionary of us, regard the Divinity of Jesus just in this way. It has no other value. We talk of imitating Him, conforming to His likeness, showing His spirit, and so on. When we want a model for courage, fidelity, gentleness, humility, unselfishness, we promptly turn to Jesus. Even in our relations with God we try to follow His lead; instinctively we range ourselves with Him when we address the universal Father; until we come to creed-making, we never think of putting Him on the God side of things, and ourselves on another. Catholic or Protestant, orthodox or unorthodox, Unitarian or Trinitarian, we all accept in practice the identity of the Divine and human in Jesus, and potentially in ourselves. But you make Him only a man! No, reader, I do not. I make Him the only Man —and there is a difference. We have only seen perfect manhood once, and that was the manhood of Jesus. The rest of us have got to get there.

Jesus and Deity.

This brings us to the further question of the Deity of Jesus. As a matter of fact, as I have already indicated, this question, too, has long been settled in practice. If by the Deity of Jesus is meant that He possessed the all-controlling consciousness of the universe, then assuredly He was not the Deity, for He did

not possess that consciousness. He prayed to His Father, sometimes with agony and dread; He wondered, suffered, wept, and grew weary. He confessed His ignorance of some things, and declared Himself to have no concern with others; it is even doubtful how far He was prepared to receive the homage of those about Him. If there be one thing which becomes indisputable from the reading of the gospel narratives, it is that Jesus possessed a true human consciousness, limited like our own, and, like our own, subject to the ordinary ills of life. Once again, everybody knows this, after a fashion. The most determined of so-called orthodox controversialists would hardly try to maintain that the consciousness of Jesus was at once limited and unlimited. To do so would be an impossible feat; if Jesus was the Deity, He certainly was not the *whole* of the Deity during His residence on earth, whatever He may be now. But, it may be objected, in His earthly life He was the Deity self-limited: "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant," etc. Quite so; but see where this statement leads. The New Theology can consistently make it, but it is difficult to see how that newer theology, which calls itself orthodoxy, manages to do so. Does the self-limitation of Jesus mean that the Deity was lessened in any way during the incarnation? Why, of course not, we should all say; the Deity continued with infinite fulness unimpaired, above and beyond the consciousness of Jesus. Then are we to

understand that this self-limitation of Jesus meant that the eternal Son, or second person in the Trinity, the Word by whom the worlds were made, quitted the throne of His glory, and lived for thirty-three years as a Jewish peasant? I think the dogmatic theologian would have some hesitation in giving an unqualified affirmative to this question, for the difficulties implied in it are practically insurmountable. Was the full consciousness of the eternal Word present in the Babe of Bethlehem, for instance? If not, where was it? Questions like these cannot be answered on the lines of the conventional Christology. The plain and simple answer to all of them is to admit that the Jesus of history did not possess the consciousness of Deity during His life on earth. His consciousness was as purely human as our own. Any special insight which He possessed into the true relations of God and man was due to the moral perfection of His nature, and not to His metaphysical status. He was God manifest in the flesh, because His life was a consistent expression of Divine love, and not otherwise. But He was not God manifest in the flesh in any way which would cut Him off from the rest of human kind. According to the received theology, Jesus, and Jesus only, out of all the beings who have ever trodden the road which humanity has to travel, existed before all ages. We live our three score years and ten, and then pass on into eternity; He was eternal to begin with. He

comes to earth with a hoary antiquity behind Him, a timeless life to look back upon; we have just fluttered into existence. Surely any ordinary intelligence can see that this kind of theologizing puts an impassable gulf at once between Jesus and every other person who has ever been born of an earthly mother. Certainly it does, the theologian may declare, and rightly so, for that gulf exists; He assumed human nature, but He was eternally Divine before He did so, and we are not. I do not need to refute this argument; the trend of modern thought is already doing so most effectually. It is a gratuitous assumption, without a shred of evidence to support it. Besides, unfortunately for this kind of statement, the scientific investigation of Christian origins, and the application of the scientific method to the history of Christian doctrine, have shown us how the dogma of the Deity of Jesus grew up. It was a comparatively late development in Christianity, and its practical implications never have been accepted, although at one time there was a danger that the winsome figure of Jesus would be removed altogether from the field of human interest and regard. The Jesus of Michael Angelo's Last Judgment is a terrifying figure, without a trace of the lowly Nazarene about Him, and yet this was the Jesus of the conventional Christianity of the time. It was through this de-humanizing of Jesus in Christian thought and experience that Mariolatry arose in the Roman Church. Could anything be more

grotesque than the suggestion that the mother of Jesus should need to plead with her son to be merciful with frail humanity? And yet this is what it came to; the figure of Mary was introduced in order to preserve a real humanity in our relations with the Godhead. All honour to those who have called us back to the real Jesus, the Jesus of Galilee and Jerusalem, the Jesus with the prophet's fire, the Jesus who was so gentle with little children and erring women, and yet before whom canting hypocrites and truculent ecclesiastics slunk away abashed. Upon this recovered Jesus the world has now fixed its adoring gaze, and it will not readily let Him go again.

Divine manhood and Unitarianism.

But then, some one will protest, this is sheer Unitarianism after all; you do not believe in the Jesus who is the object of the faith of Christendom, but in one who was only a man among men; you do not think of Him as very God of very God. Not so fast; we are busy with names again. Most of us have a tendency to think that if we can get a doctrine labelled and pigeon-holed we know all about it; but we are generally mistaken. This is not Unitarianism, and I do believe that Jesus was very God, as I have already shown. We have to get rid of the dualism which will insist on putting humanity and Deity into two separate categories. I say it is not Unitarianism, for historic Unitarianism has been just as prone to this dualism as the extremest Trinitarianism has ever been.

Like Trinitarianism, it has often tended to regard humanity as on one side of a gulf and Deity as on the other; it has emphasized too much the transcendence of God. The sentence already quoted from an orthodox Trinitarian divine about "God's eternal eminence and His descent on a created world" might just as well have been employed by an out-and-out Unitarian. Modern Unitarianism is in part the descendant of eighteenth century Deism, which insisted upon the transcendence of God almost to the exclusion of His immanence; it thought of God as away somewhere above the universe, watching it but leaving the machine pretty much to itself. Unitarianism, in the course of its history from the first century downward, has passed through a good many phases. Present-day Unitarianism is preaching with fervour and clearness the foundation truth of the New Theology, the fundamental unity of God and man. But it does not belong to it exclusively, and I decline to be labelled Unitarian because I preach it too. The New Theology is not a victory for Unitarianism. If ever the English-speaking communities of the world should come to be united under a single flag, would it be just and wise to call them all Americans? No doubt some of our American cousins would like to think so, but there is enough of virility and solid worth on the British side of the question to make that description impossible. The title would be a misnomer, and, in fact, an absurdity. The case in regard to the

connection of the New Theology with Unitarianism is not dissimilar. It is only sectarian Unitarians who would try to claim it for their own denomination; the best and most outstanding exponents of Unitarianism would not wish to do anything of the kind, for they know well enough that, historically speaking, they have not consistently stood for it any more than any other denomination. The New Theology does not belong to any one Church, but to all. For my own part I would not even take the trouble to try to turn a Roman Catholic into a Protestant. Let every man stay in the Church whose spiritual atmosphere and modes of worship best accord with his temperament, but let him recognize the deeper unity that lies below the formal creeds. The old issue between Unitarianism and Trinitarianism vanishes in the New Theology—the bottom is knocked out of the controversy. Unitarianism used to declare that Jesus was man, *not* God; Trinitarianism maintained that He was God *and* man; the oldest Christian thought, as well as the youngest, regards Him as God *in* man—God manifest in the flesh. But here emerges a great point of difference between the New Theology on the one hand, and traditional orthodoxy on the other. The latter would restrict the description "God manifest in the flesh" to Jesus alone; the New Theology would extend it in a lesser degree to all humanity, and would maintain that in the end it will be as true of every individual soul as ever it was of Jesus. Indeed, it is this

belief that gives value and significance to the earthly mission of Jesus. He came to show us what we potentially are. This is a great and important issue, which requires to be treated in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER VI

THE ETERNAL CHRIST

In the course of Christian history a good deal of time has been occupied in the discussion of the metaphysical question of the complex unity of the Divine nature, and the result has been the doctrine of the Trinity, a conception which, it has been claimed, at once satisfies and transcends the operations of the human intellect. Most non-theological modern minds are, however, somewhat suspicious of the doctrine of the Trinity; it seems rather too speculative and too remote from ordinary ways of thinking to possess much real value. But this is quite a mistake. We cannot dispense with the doctrine of the Trinity, for it, or something like it, is implied in the very structure of the mind. It belongs to philosophy even more than to religion, and to the sphere of ethics not less. I dare say even the man in the street knows, quite as certainly as the man in the schools, that a metaphysical proposition underlies the doing of every moral act, even though it may never be expressed. All thinking starts with an assumption of some kind,

and without an assumption thought is impossible. This is just as true of the strictest scientific processes as it is of deductive reasoning, and indeed it is interesting to watch the way in which within recent years idealistic philosophy and empirical science have joined hands. Does physical science, then, imply the doctrine of the Trinity? Yes, unquestionably it does, after a fashion, for it starts with an assumption which takes it for granted. Perhaps this would be news to Professor Ray Lankester, and such as he, but I think I could convince them that I am right if I had them face to face. To use the mind at all, we have to assume this doctrine, even though we may not actually formulate it. Christianity did not invent it; it clarified and defined it, but in principle it is as old as the exercise of human reason.

The basal assumption of thought.

After making a comprehensive assertion of this kind I suppose I am bound to justify it, and I do not shrink from the task. I say that all thinking starts with an assumption of some kind, and exact thought requires that that assumption shall be the simplest possible, the irreducible minimum beneath which we cannot get. Now, when we start thinking about existence as a whole, and ourselves in particular, we are compelled to assume the infinite, the finite, and the activity of the former within the latter. In other words, we have to postulate God, the universe, and God's operation within the universe. Look at these three conceptions

for a moment, and it will be seen that every one of them implies the rest; they are a Trinity in unity. The primordial being must be infinite, for there cannot be a finite without something still beyond it. We know, too, that to our experience the universe is finite; we can measure, weigh, and analyze it—an impossible thing to do with an infinite substance. And yet if we think of infinite and finite as two entirely distinct and unrelated modes of existence, we find ourselves in an impossible position, for the infinite must be that outside of which nothing exists or can exist; so, of course, we are compelled to think of the infinite as ever active within the finite, the source of change and motion, the exhaustless power which makes possible the very idea of development from simplicity to complexity. If the universe were complete in itself change would not occur, and a cosmic process, evolutionary or otherwise, would be inconceivable. Here, then, we have the basal factors of any true theology, philosophy, or science. Readers of Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe" will note that that eminent materialist, who professes to do away with the very idea of God, takes these factors for granted; and yet I suppose he would object to being told that he believes in the doctrine of the Trinity. But he does, for he begins by assuming infinite space filled to the farthest with matter ponderable and imponderable, and forthwith proceeds to weigh, measure, and divide the latter as though it were finite!

Here are two terms of the doctrine of the Trinity at once. We get the third as soon as Professor Haeckel sets to work to explain the cosmic process, for, as he does so, he is all the while taking for granted that the infinite is pressing in and up through the finite, evolving beauty and order, light and life.

The moral basis of the doctrine.

But it may be contended that these bare bones of the doctrine of the Trinity are not the doctrine as it enters into spiritual experience. I admit the fact while asserting strongly that but for this framework of intellectual necessity the doctrine would be unknown to faith and morals. It is sometimes stated that the doctrine of the Trinity was formulated in order to account for Jesus, but that is only incidentally true. Its framers took the materials for it over from Greek thought, and even Greek thought probably inherited it from an older civilization still, if indeed there were any necessity to inherit it. I contend that if we had never heard of the doctrine in connection with Jesus, we should have to invent it now in order to account for ourselves and the wondrous universe in which we live.

Unquestionably, however, it is from the point of view of religion and morals that the doctrine has most significance, and therefore has become indissolubly associated with the personality of Jesus, and it is easy to see how this has come about. Thinkers have always been compelled to construe the universe in terms of the highest

known to man, namely, his own moral nature. It was natural, therefore, that while they thought of the universe as an expression of God, they should think of it as the expression of that side of His being which can only be described as the ideal or archetypal manhood. The infinite being of God is utterly incomprehensible to a finite mind, and in regard to it the most devout saint is as much an agnostic as the most convinced materialist. But we are justified in holding that, whatever else He may be, God is essentially man, that is, He is the fount of humanity. There must be one side, so to speak, of the infinitely complex being of God in which humanity is eternally contained, and which finds expression in the finite universe. Humanity is not a vague term; we have already seen something of what it is. We ought not to interpret it in terms of the primeval savage, or even of average human nature to-day, but in terms of what we have come to feel is its highest expression, and that is Jesus. If we think, therefore, of the archetypal eternal Divine Man, the source and sustenance of the universe, and yet transcending the universe, we cannot do better than think of Him in terms of Jesus; Jesus is the fullest expression of that eternal Divine Man on the field of human history. Here, then, we have the first and second factors in the doctrine of the Trinity morally and spiritually construed.

The idea of a Divine Man, the emanation of the infinite, the Soul of the universe, the source

and goal of all humanity, is ages older than Christian theology. It can be traced in Babylonian religious literature, for instance, at a period older even than the Old Testament. It played a not unimportant part in Greek thought, and Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus, works it out in some detail in his religio-philosophic system which aimed to combine the wide outlook of Greek culture with the high seriousness of Hebrew religion. It is a true, indeed an inevitable conception, if we hold anything like a consistent view of the immanence of God in His universe. With what God have we to do except the God who is eternally man? This aspect of the nature of God has been variously described in the course of its history. It has been called the Word, the Son, and, as we have seen, the second person in the Trinity. For various reasons I prefer to call it—or rather Him—the eternal Christ. I do this because, for one thing, the word Christ is a living word with a clearly marked ethical content and a great religious value. Originally, of course, it was but the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah," and meant the "anointed one," the person chosen for a special Divine work. But in the New Testament, especially the writings of St. Paul, as well as all Christian history through, it is associated, on the one hand, with the personality of Jesus, and, on the other, with the fontal or ideal Man who contains and is expressed in all human kind. According to the New Testament writers Jesus

The Divine Man.

was and is the Christ, but in His earthly life His consciousness of the fact was limited. But, as we have come forth from this fontal manhood, we too must be to some extent expressions of this eternal Christ; and it is in virtue of that fact that we stand related to Jesus, and that the personality of Jesus has anything to do with us. Here is where the value of our belief in the interaction of the higher and the lower self comes in. Fundamentally our being is already one with that of the eternal Christ, and faith in Jesus is faith in Him. Jesus is not one being and the Christ another; the two are one, and Jesus seems to have known it during His earthly ministry. He lived His life in such a way as to reveal the very essence of the Christ nature. He is therefore central for us, and we are complete in Him. Here is the goal of all moral effort—Christ. Here, too, is the highest reach of the religious ideal—Christ. "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

I am persuaded that we have here the key to the Christology of that great thinker and preacher the Apostle Paul. It is this ideal or eternal Christ who is the object of his faith and devotion. He even goes so far as to warn his readers not to dwell too much upon the limited earthly Jesus, but upon His true being in the eternal reality: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea,

The Christ of St. Paul.

though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now, henceforth, know we Him no more." He does not say, "To me to live is Jesus," but "To me to live is *Christ*." If ever there was a Christian who really loved Jesus with passionate and whole-hearted devotion, it was the Apostle Paul; but he says almost nothing about the earthly ministry of his Lord. He seems to have had a vivid impression as to what the character of Jesus was really like, and he gave himself up to the worship of this with all his heart; but he does not draw for us any of the beautiful gospel pictures of the Jesus in the peasant's dress who taught on the hillsides of Galilee, went about doing good, was a welcome guest in the home at Bethany, lived a true human life, and died a shameful death. Paul always thought of Him, and truly, as the Lord who came down from heaven; but he does *not* draw a sharp line of distinction between Him and the rest of humanity. He calls Jesus "the firstborn among many brethren." He speaks of the summing-up of all things in Christ, and of the final consummation when God shall be all in all. Here is the New Theology with a vengeance. Paul requires to be rescued from the inadequate and distorting interpretations his thought has received in the course of its history. He brought this conception of the eternal Christ into Christianity from pre-Christian thought, saw it ideally revealed in Jesus, and then bade mankind respond to it and realize it to be the true explanation of our own

being. Sometimes he appears to deviate from this view, and to say things inconsistent with it, but that we need not mind; he saw it, and that is enough. It forms the foundation of his gospel.

CHAPTER VII

THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

So far we have seen that the personality of Jesus is central for Christian faith. We deny nothing about Him that Christian devotion has ever affirmed; but we affirm the same things of humanity as a whole in a differing degree. The practical dualism which regards Jesus as coming into humanity from something that beforehand was not humanity we declare to be misleading. Our view of the subject does not belittle Jesus, but it exalts human nature. Let this be clearly understood, and most of the objections to it will vanish. Briefly summed up, the position is as follows: Jesus was God, but so are we. He was God because His life was the expression of Divine love; we, too, are one with God in so far as our lives express the same thing. Jesus was not God in the sense that He possessed an infinite consciousness; no more are we. Jesus expressed fully and completely, in so far as a finite consciousness ever could, that aspect of the nature of God which we have called the eternal Son, or Christ, or ideal Man who is the Soul of the

Jesus all that Christian devotion has believed Him to be.

universe, and "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world;" we are expressions of the same primordial being. Fundamentally, we are all one in this eternal Christ. This is the most difficult statement of all to make clear, for the average Westerner cannot grasp it; it is different from his ordinary way of looking at things. The best way of demonstrating it, as I have already shown, is to draw attention to the fact that Christian orthodoxy has all along been affirming the mystic union between Christ and the soul, and that the limited earthly consciousness of Jesus did not prevent Him from being really and truly God. Why should we not speak in a similar way about any other human consciousness? If we could only get men to do so habitually and sincerely, it would be the greatest gain to religion that could possibly be imagined. In the third chapter I have pointed out that psychological science is doing much to help us towards this realization. We are beginning to see, however hard it may be to understand it, that our limited individual consciousness is no barrier to the true identification of the lesser with the larger self. What Christian doctrine, therefore, has been affirming of Jesus for hundreds of years past is receiving impressive confirmation from modern science, and is being seen to be true of every human being—that is, the lesser and the larger are one, however little the earthly consciousness may be able to grasp the fact. To me this is a most helpful and inspiring truth,

one of the most important that has ever found a place in Christian thought; it elucidates much that would otherwise be obscure. It enables us to see how the human and Divine were blended in Jesus without making Him essentially different from the rest of the human race; it enables us to realize our own true origin and to believe in the salvability of every soul that has ever come to moral consciousness. If this truth will not lift a man towards the higher life, I do not know one that will. It is the truth implied in all redemptive effort that has ever been made, and in every message that has ever gripped conscience and heart; it is, as the Creed has it, "the taking of the manhood into God."

The pre-eminence of Jesus.

Lest any one should think that this position involves in the slightest degree the diminution of the religious value and the moral pre-eminence of Jesus, let me say that it does the very opposite. Nothing can be higher than the highest, and the life of Jesus was the undimmed revelation of the highest. Faith to be effective must centre on a living person, and the highest objective it has ever found is Jesus. He is no abstraction but a spiritual reality, an ever-present Friend and Guide, our Brother and our Lord. No one will ever compete with Jesus for this position in human hearts. When I speak of the eternal Christ, I do not mean some one different from Jesus, although I certainly do mean the basal principle of all human goodness; Jesus was and

is that Christ, and we can only understand what the Christ is because we have seen Him. Whole-hearted faith in Him has proved itself to be the most effective means to the manifestation of our own Christhood.

This thought at once opens up another great question to which we have already alluded, that of the Incarnation of this eternal Christ or Son of God in the finite universe. According to the received theology the incarnation of God in human life was limited to the life of Jesus only, and through Him to mankind. I purposely say popular theology, because the best Christian thought has always known better. Popular theology has it that Jesus, the only-begotten eternal Son of God, took human flesh and a human nature, was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin, and was born into the world in a wholly miraculous way—a way which stamps Him as different from all that were ever born of woman before or since. It seems strange that belief in the virgin birth of Jesus should ever have been held to be a cardinal article of the Christian faith, but it is so even to-day. There is not much need to combat it, for most reputable theologians have now given it up, but it is still a stumbling-block to many minds. Perhaps, therefore, a brief examination of the subject may not be altogether out of place.

Jesus and the Incarnation.

The virgin birth of Jesus was apparently unknown to the primitive Church, for the

earliest New Testament writings make no mention of it. Paul's letters do not allude to it, neither does the Gospel of St. Mark. "In the fulness of time," says the great apostle, "God sent forth His Son born of a woman." He was "of the seed of David according to the flesh." But nowhere does Paul give us so much as a hint of anything supernatural attending the mode of His entry into the world. Mark does not even tell us anything about the childhood of the Master; his account begins with the baptism of Jesus in Jordan. The Fourth Gospel, although written much later, ignores the belief in the virgin birth, and even seems to do so of set purpose as belittling and materializing the truth. The supposed Old Testament prophecies of the event have nothing whatever to do with it. The famous passage, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel," is a reference to contemporary events, and the word translated "virgin" simply means a young woman. It is a prophecy of the birth of a prince whose work it should be to put right for Judah what the reigning King Ahaz had been putting wrong. The story in the seventh of Isaiah is as follows. Ahaz, a rather weak ruler, was greatly concerned by the news that Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, King of North Israel, had formed an alliance against him and were marching on Jerusalem. In his extremity this monarch of a petty state turned towards the mighty ruler of Assyria, the

The virgin birth not demonstrable from Scripture.

greatest military power in the world, and asked his help against the combination. Isaiah, statesman as well as prophet, saw that this was a wrong move. Assyria was aspiring to universal dominion, and to form an alliance with the military master of that mighty state would be to supply him with an excuse for further interference. The policy of Ahaz was, therefore, as suicidal as that of John Balliol when he called in Edward the First to adjudicate on his claim to the crown of Scotland, or the policy of Spain when she called in Napoleon. Sargon, King of Assyria, was overturning thrones in all directions, profiting by the divisions and jealousies of his foes. The great empires of Egypt and Babylonia went down before him as well as the smaller states. The condition of things in this ancient world was just like that of Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the star of Napoleon was in the ascendant. For Ahaz to turn for help to Sargon was to court disaster in the end. Isaiah saw this, and went out to meet Ahaz one day "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field"—a vivid descriptive touch. The king was apparently preparing to stand a siege in his capital, and was making sure of the water supply. Isaiah's remonstrance was in substance: You need not take so much trouble with your preparations; Syria and Israel will have more than enough to do presently to defend their own borders from Sargon. Besides, men

like Rezin and Pekah are not men to be afraid of in any case; they have neither strength nor skill. But do not, for Heaven's sake, call in Sargon; if you do, you will supply him with an excuse for meddling, and we shall never get rid of him. This was good counsel, but Ahaz was too short-sighted and panic-stricken to take much notice of it; so in Oriental fashion Isaiah goes on to paint a picture of future disaster. The land, he says, will soon be laid waste, and future generations will rue the policy now being determined upon. In the end, of course, things will come all right, for God will not abandon His people. A better and wiser prince shall arise who shall restore prosperity to Judah. That prince is not yet born, but when he is, his name shall be called Immanuel —God with us. In another place he describes him as Wonderful Counsellor, Divine Hero, Father everlasting, Prince of Peace. "Butter and honey shall he eat," because there will be nothing else left after Assyria has swept over the country; but the discipline may have good results in the end, and will serve to bring Judah to her senses.

There is something strikingly modern about all this, and it is a good example of the way in which the same conditions arise over and over again in the course of human history. It is plain to be seen that the prophecy here indicated was only the shrewd common sense of a wise and patriotic man who loved his country and believed in God. But what on earth have his words to do

with the birth of Jesus? It is only by a very long stretch of the pious imagination that they can be held to apply to Christianity at all. They have an interest of their own, and a very considerable interest too, even from the point of view of religion, but Isaiah would have been considerably astonished to be told that they would have to wait seven hundred years for fulfilment. To a certain extent they were fulfilled soon afterwards in the advent of the well-meaning but not very brilliant King Hezekiah. I have dwelt upon this passage at some length, because it is a fair example of the way in which Old Testament literature has been pressed into the service of Christian dogma. What I am now saying, as I need hardly point out, is not my *ipse dixit;* expert Biblical scholarship has been saying it for a long time, but somehow or other its bearing upon generally accepted dogma is not popularly realized. It can hardly be maintained that Christian preachers who know the truth about these matters and refrain from stating it plainly are doing their duty to their congregations. No Old Testament passage whatever is directly or indirectly a prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus. To insist upon this may seem to many like beating a man of straw; but if so, the man of straw still retains a good deal of vitality.

The only two Gospels in which the virgin birth is alluded to are Matthew and Luke, and the nativity stories contained in these are very beautiful, especially those peculiar to Luke. But

the two Gospels are mutually contradictory in their account of the circumstances attending the miraculous birth. Each contains a genealogy which professes to be that of Joseph, not of Mary, and these are inconsistent with each other. What has the genealogy of Joseph got to do with the birth of Jesus if Jesus were not his own son? The conclusion seems probable that in the earlier versions of these Gospels the miraculous conception did not find a place, or else that two inconsistent sources have been drawn upon without sufficient care being taken to reconcile them. But this is not the only discrepancy. Matthew gives Bethlehem as the native place of Joseph and Mary; Luke says Nazareth. Matthew says not a word about the census of Cyrenius as the motive for the journey to Bethlehem, but leads us to suppose that the holy family were already in residence there. Then, again, he tells us of the coming of the wise men from the East, their public inquiry as to the whereabouts of the holy child, the jealousy of Herod, the massacre of the innocents, and the flight into Egypt. Luke says nothing about these things, but gives us an entirely different set of wonders, including the attendance of an angelic host and the annunciation to the shepherds. So far from recording any massacre, or any hasty flight, he tells us that some time after His birth the babe was taken to the Temple at Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord, and that afterwards He and His parents "returned

The virgin birth in the Gospels.

into Galilee to their own city Nazareth." According to Matthew, Nazareth was an afterthought, and only became the residence of the holy family after the return from Egypt. These accounts do not tally, and no ingenuity can reconcile them. The nativity stories belong to the poetry of religion, not to history. To regard them as narrations of actual fact is to misunderstand them. They are better than that; they take us into the region of exalted feeling, and give us a vision of truth too great for prosaic statement. Christianity would be poorer by the loss of them, but they are not indigenous to Christianity. They have their parallels in other religions, some of them much older than the advent of Jesus. The beautiful legends surrounding the infancy of Gautama, for example, are startlingly similar to those contained in the first and third Gospels. Like Jesus, the Buddhist Messiah is stated to have been of royal descent, and was born of a virgin mother. At his birth a supernatural radiance illuminated the whole district, and a troop of heavenly beings sang the praises of the holy child. Later on a wise man, guided by special portents, recognized him as the long-expected and divinely appointed light-bringer and life-giver of mankind. When but a youth he was lost for a time, and was found by his father in the midst of a circle of holy men, sunk in rapt contemplation of the great mystery of existence. The parallel between these legends and the Christian version of the marvels attending

the birth of Jesus is so close as to preclude the possibility of its being altogether accidental. There must have been a connection somewhere, and, indeed, there is no need to think otherwise, for nothing is to be gained or lost by admitting it.

Christianity not dependent on a virgin birth.

But why hesitate about the question? The greatness of Jesus, and the value of His revelation to mankind, are in no way either assisted or diminished by the manner of His entry into the world. Every birth is just as wonderful as a virgin birth could possibly be, and just as much a direct act of God. A supernatural conception bears no relation whatever to the moral and spiritual worth of the person who is supposed to enter the world in this abnormal way. The credibility and significance of Christianity are in no way affected by the doctrine of the virgin birth, otherwise than that the belief tends to put a barrier between Jesus and the race, and to make Him something which cannot properly be called human. Those who insist on the doctrine will find themselves in danger of proving too much, for, pressed to its logical conclusion, it removes Jesus altogether from the category of humanity in any real sense. Like many others, I used to take the position that acceptance or non-acceptance of the doctrine of the virgin birth was immaterial because Christianity was quite independent of it; but later reflection has convinced me that in point of fact it operates as a hindrance to spiritual religion and a real living faith in Jesus. The

simple and natural conclusion is that Jesus was the child of Joseph and Mary, and had an uneventful childhood.

And yet, as with every tenet which has held a place in human thought for any considerable length of time, there is a great truth contained in the idea of a virgin birth. It is the truth that the emergence of anything great and beautiful in human character and achievement is the work of the Divine Spirit operating within human limitations. The idea is very ancient, and there is no great religion which does not contain it in some form or other. One form of it, for example, can be discerned in the Babylonian creation myth with its parallel in the Book of Genesis. The home of the primitive Chaldæans, the stock whence Israelites, Babylonians, Assyrians, and other Semitic communities sprang, was in the low-lying territory surrounding the Persian Gulf. During the rainy seasons these lands were flooded by the overflow of the great rivers. The sun of springtime, rising upon this mass of waters which stretched in every direction as far as the eye could see, drew forth from their bosom the life and beauty of summer flowers and fruit. From observation of this regularly recurring phenomenon, the primitive Semites constructed their creation myth, one version of which appears in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis—a version much later than the Babylonian, but an outgrowth of the same idea. They thought of a primeval waste

The truth in the doctrine of the virgin birth.

of water covering everything. As the writer of the Genesis account has it: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." In the Babylonian version this primeval water was personified as a woman —Tiamat. They thought of the sun of heaven as impregnating this virgin matrix with the seeds of cosmic life—quite an accurate conception from the modern point of view. Later on this idea became spiritualized in a much higher degree. The religious mind came to regard the physical, mundane, or distinctively human principle as the matrix upon which the Spirit of God brooded, bringing to the birth a Divine idea. And this is perfectly true too, as any one can see. Nothing great and noble in human experience can be accounted for merely in terms of atoms and molecules. That is where materialism always comes to grief, for on its own premises it cannot account for the emergence of intelligence and all the higher qualities of human nature. A Divine element, a spiritual quickening, is required for the evolution of anything God-like in our mundane sphere; it is a virgin birth. Lower acting upon lower can never produce a higher. It is the downpouring and incoming of the higher to the lower which produces through the lower the Divine manhood which leaves the brute behind. This is the sense in which it is true that Jesus was of Divine as well as human parentage. We do not account for Him merely by saying that He was the son of Joseph and Mary, and the

descendant of a long line of prophets, priests, and kings; we have to recognize that His true greatness came from above.

The same thing holds good in a lesser degree of everything worthy of Jesus in human experience. We do not account for any man's goodness or greatness by pointing to his ancestry. Heredity may account for a great deal, but it is inadequate as an explanation of genius or high moral achievement. If we go back far enough we shall find that our ancestry was barbarous, and, judging from its tendencies, not at all likely to produce the Christ-man of future ages. Wherever the Christ-man appears, we have to acknowledge that the principal factor in his evolution is the incoming of the Divine Spirit. It is only another way of stating what has already been stated above, that the true man or higher self is Divine and eternal, integral to the being of God, and that this Divine manhood is gradually but surely manifesting on the physical plane. The lower cannot produce the higher, but the higher is shaping and transforming the lower; every moral and spiritual advance is therefore of the nature of a virgin birth, a quickening from above. The spiritual birth described in the conversation between our Lord and Nicodemus, as given in the third of John, is, properly speaking, a virgin birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." "Ye must be born anew," or, literally, "quickened

True of all higher human experience.

from above." Every man who deliberately faces towards the highest, and feels himself reinforced by the Spirit of God in so doing, is quickened from above; the divinely human Christ is born in him, the Word has become flesh and is manifested to the world.

Human history one long incarnation.

If now we can turn our thoughts away for a moment from the individual to the race, and think of humanity as one being, or the expression of one being, we shall read this truth on a larger scale. All human history represents the incarnation or manifesting of the eternal Son or Christ of God. The incarnation cannot be limited to one life only, however great that life may be. It is quite a false idea to think of Jesus and no one else as the Son of God incarnate. It is easy to understand the loving reverence for Jesus which would lead men to regard Him as being and expressing something to which none of the rest of us can ever attain, but in affirming this we actually rob Him of a glory He ought to receive. We make Him unreal, reduce His earthly life to a sort of drama, and effect a drastic distinction in kind between Him and ourselves. If He came from the further side of the gulf, and we only from the hither; if we are humanity without Divinity, and He Divinity that has only assumed humanity, perfect fellowship between Him and ourselves is impossible. But it is untrue to say that any such distinction exists. Let us go on thinking of Jesus as Christ, the very Christ of glory, but let us

realize that that same Christ is seeking expression through every human soul. He is incarnate in the race in order that by means of limitation He may manifest the innermost of God, the life and love eternal. To say this does not dethrone Jesus; it lends significance to His life and work. He is on the throne, and the sceptre is in His hand. We can rise towards Him by trusting, loving, and serving Him; and by so doing we shall demonstrate that we too are Christ the eternal Son.

To think of all human life as a manifestation of the eternal Son renders it sacred. Our very struggles and sufferings become full of meaning. Sin is but the failure to realize it; it is being false to ourselves and our Divine origin; it is the centrifugal tendency in human nature, just as love is the centripetal. There is no life, however depraved, which does not occasionally emit some sign of its kinship to Jesus and its eternal sonship to God. Wherever you see self-sacrifice at work, you see the very spirit of Jesus, the spirit of the Christ incarnate. I find it everywhere, and it interprets life for me as nothing else can. Take up any work of fiction, no matter what, and you will find the author instinctively preaching this truth. Look into any commonplace everyday life, no matter whose, and you will find it exemplified. Many a selfish bad man has one tender spot in his nature, his affection for his child, and for the sake of that child he will deny himself as he has never dreamed of doing

for anything else; so far as that one influence is concerned, he actually reverses the principle which governs the rest of his life. I have read of an African negress who on one occasion was beaten nearly to death by the brute to whom she was slave and paramour. Her murderer, for such he was, was arrested and placed on trial for his misdemeanour, in accordance with the rough justice of the white man in his dealings with the native. In the night, the poor dying woman crawled painfully to the tree against which the ruffian lay bound, cut his cords, and set him free. It was her last act in this life; in the morning she was found lying dead on the spot whence the prisoner had fled. This particular story may, or may not, be true, but the same kind of thing has been true a million times in human history. What was the spirit in this benighted woman of the African wilds but the Christ spirit, the self-giving spirit seen with such unique sublimity in the life of Jesus?

Look abroad all through the world, look back upon the slow upward progress of humanity to its home in God, and you will read the story of the incarnation of the eternal Son. Never has there been an hour so dark but that some gleams of this eternal light have pierced the murky pall of human ignorance and sin; never have bitter hate and fiendish cruelty gone altogether unrelieved by the human tenderness and self-devotion that testify of God. Indeed, without the limitation, the struggle, and the pain, how

would this Christ spirit ever have known itself? Granted that self-surrender had never been called for by the conditions of life, granted that our resources had always known themselves infinite, and that which is worthiest and sublimest in the nature of God and man alike could never have been revealed. This is why the eternal Son has become incarnate; this is what we are here to do, and upon the faithful doing of it depends our experience of the joy that the world can neither give nor take away. The life and death of Jesus are the central expression and ideal embodiment of this age-long process, a process the consummation of which will be the glorious return and triumphant ingathering of a redeemed and perfectly unified humanity to God. "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

CHAPTER VIII

THE ATONEMENT

I. Association of the Doctrine with Jesus

This brings us to a subject which, more than any other, with the exception of that of the person of Jesus, has come under discussion at the present time. In the course of Christian history it has created a more extensive literature than probably any other doctrine. I mean the subject variously known as Salvation, Redemption, Atonement, and with which the terms Forgiveness, Expiation, Reconciliation, Ransom, Justification, Propitiation, Satisfaction, Sanctification, and such like have been commonly associated. The Christian doctrine of Atonement, as we may call it for convenience, bulks so large in Christian thought that all others may be held to be dependent upon it, even that of the person of Jesus; for, according to the received theology, Jesus became incarnate for our redemption, and that redemption can only be accomplished by One who is very God.

Importance of the subject.

But there is no subject upon which modern

Christian thought is less coherent than this. We are constantly hearing the statement that a rational theory of the Atonement is badly wanted, or that it is our duty to preach the fact without a theory, or that the Atonement is such a mystery that no theory is possible, and we must just accept it on faith. This confession of helplessness shows that there is something seriously wrong with the conventional presentation of the doctrine. But I do not think the Atonement is such a very great mystery after all, and it ought to be possible to get at the heart of it without stultifying the intellect. Anyhow, let us try.

The need for an adequate explanation.

As a rule, treatises on the Atonement begin with an examination of the Scripture passages which are supposed to have a bearing upon it. Then follows a careful examination and criticism of the various theories of it which have successively held the field during its history; the author concludes by giving us his own. I do not propose to follow that method, for it does not possess a living interest for the mind of to-day; the psychological should take precedence of the historical. I do not feel called upon to take the doctrine of Atonement for granted, and then proceed to try to find a place for it in Christian experience. On the contrary, I prefer to take human nature for granted, and inquire whether it needs anything like a doctrine of Atonement. If it does not, let the doctrine go; if it does, let us see that the

The usual theological method of expounding it.

doctrine is presented in a reasonable fashion. If it cannot be presented reasonably it is not wanted. But I think it is wanted, and more than wanted; it is already taken for granted by every one who thinks seriously about life, whether it is called by its theological name or not.

Before I proceed to attempt to justify these statements, let me ask my readers to call to mind the outline of what they have been taught in reference to this great fundamental of the Christian faith. Part of it has already been indicated, for it was hardly possible to avoid it when considering such a subject as that of the nature of evil or the Divinity of Jesus. Roughly stated, it is as follows. Our fallen humanity is separated from and under the displeasure of God. God longs to save us from our sin, but justice demands that He must punish us. The world is already an unhappy place because of sin; but what we endure here is nothing to what we shall have to endure presently, when we cross the river of death; we shall all go to hell, a place of never-ending torment, unless some means can be found of justifying us before God ere we pass over. This means has been found in the self-devotion of the second person in the Trinity. The sinless Son of God took upon Himself the likeness of sinful humanity, was born into this world, lived here for a few years, suffered a violent death, and then reascended to His Father to make unceasing intercession for mankind. It

Outline of present-day accepted belief in regard to it.

was the dying of the death that was the all-important thing. It was in consideration of this death that God agreed to pardon sin. Jesus was put to death because God had arranged that He should be put to death, and because Jesus was willing to be put to death, in order that a satisfactory offering might be made to Divine justice for the sins of the world. God had to punish some one before He could be free to forgive His erring children, and therefore, with the consent of Jesus, He punished Him. The whole scheme was prearranged in heaven, cross and all, and therefore Jesus was not taken by surprise when the end came; He was, in fact, a party to it, and His murderers were, in a sense, only the instruments of a beneficent fore-ordained plan. God accepts this sacrifice as a full and complete equivalent for all that humanity deserves, but we must individually appropriate it by faith, or it will not avail for us, we shall go to hell all the same. If, on the other hand, we do claim the benefit of this finished work, the merits of the Redeemer are imputed to us; we are held to be justified before God, and are gradually sanctified by the Holy Spirit operating within our souls and fashioning us into the moral likeness of our Lord.

To say that these statements are wholly untrue is impossible, for they every one contain a truth of considerable value; but, as popularly stated, they are misleading. This view of the Atonement is unethical, and, in my judgment and

that of many others, has wrought a good deal of mischief in the past and bewilderment in the present. Some readers of these pages will, no doubt, find fault with me for stating it so baldly, and will maintain that no front-rank theologian or preacher would enunciate it in these terms to-day. Once again, I can only repeat that they use language which implies it, and it seems impossible to resist the conclusion that they are driven to use the vaguer language because of their own feeling that the balder statement, which their predecessors made without hesitation, is intellectually and morally impossible, and yet they do not know what to put in its place. They are reluctant to give up the belief that in some way or other the death of Jesus on Calvary actually effected something in the unseen by making God propitious towards us and removing the barrier which prevented Him from freely forgiving human sin. Of course, they add other and valuable elements in their discussion of the theme; but this is their central idea, and they seldom get away from it. The typical theologian never seems to think of looking at the death of Jesus from the purely human point of view; and yet surely this is the only legitimate thing to do when trying to get at the heart of the subject. It is what we should do in any other case of the kind; we should never dream of doing anything else. We have no business to begin speculating upon transcendental questions until we have examined the

Conventional view both true and false.

purely human causes of such an event as the crucifixion of Jesus. When an adherent of the so-called orthodox view of the doctrine of the Atonement is pressed to say just what he supposes the death of Jesus to have effected in the mind of God, so as to free humanity from its curse, he usually takes refuge in phrases about the "mystery of the cross," and so on. He does not say in plain language exactly what he means, for the truth is he does not know; he only believes what he has been told, and has persuaded himself that it is of the utmost value to Christian experience; which it is not, and never was. The doctrine, as popularly held, is not only not true, but it ought not to be true; it is a serious hindrance to spiritual religion. Why in the world should God require such a sacrifice before feeling Himself free to forgive His erring children? And why should it be regarded as in any real sense a substitute for what is due from us, or any equivalent for what we should otherwise have to bear? Once more, perhaps the dogmatic theologian will pull me up sharply and say that I am misrepresenting him; but I think I am on fairly safe ground in declaring that this is what the ordinary man in the pew as well as the man in the street understands by the saving work of Jesus, and he does so because of the language of the pulpit, backed by the theological college preceptor. If this is the Atonement, there is little wonder that thoughtful minds will have nothing to say to it, and that so many

good people are puzzled to know what to think about it.

The human causes of the crucifixion of Jesus.

If the death of Jesus took place under similar circumstances to-day, we should be in no doubt as to what to call it. It was a barbarous and wicked murder, instigated by base and unscrupulous men who wanted to get rid of a dangerous teacher. We do not need to search far in order to find reasons for the tragedy. There were reasons enough in the antagonism which had long existed between Jesus and the ecclesiastical rulers of Judæa. Jesus held and taught a certain ideal concerning human life and its relation to God. At the beginning of His brief public ministry He seems to have thought that His invitation to men to realize their Divine sonship would meet with a ready response, and that therefore the kingdom of God would, without great difficulty, be established upon earth through the working of the spirit of love in human hearts. At first He gained an extensive hearing, because the Jewish people were willing and ready to listen to any teacher who would hold out to them some hope of a better and happier day. Consequently He was for a time extremely popular, and even the Pharisees deliberated as to whether He might prove to be the long-expected leader who should restore the kingdom to Israel. But this attitude soon changed. People and rulers alike became disappointed with Jesus. They were looking for a kingdom which should come by force, and

Jesus for one which should come by love. They wanted material benefits forthwith, while to Jesus these were altogether a secondary matter. Then, too, He became an inconvenience. His standard of rectitude was exacting. He saw through the hypocrisies and villainies of many of those who posed as the guides and directors of the nation, and He was not silent about them. He spoke out without fear or hesitation. What other people had been thinking and dared not say, He said without pausing to consider what the consequences might be. No wonder the ecclesiastics came to feel that He must be silenced at any cost. It can hardly be supposed that people in general were offended by His plain language concerning those in high places, but then they wanted Him to do something besides talk. They wanted to see Him drive out the Roman without delay, and inaugurate the era of power and plenty. Jesus saw well enough what the end of all this must be. He must either temporize a little, or go away and hide, or go straight on doing His work until the night came and He could work no more. He decided for the last-named course, leaving the results to God. It was in the line of His duty to go up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, so to Jerusalem He went. He could hardly have been under any delusion as to what awaited Him there. The crowds in the capital were very excited about Him; His name was on every lip, and there were many who would have

declared for Him at once if He had only offered Himself as the national champion against the foreigner. But by this time priests, Pharisees, and scribes understood that, in their sense of the word, a national champion He would never be. The crisis was reached at the cleansing of the temple. The moral greatness, the tremendous impressiveness of the personality of Jesus were never more clearly demonstrated than on this occasion. There was no earthly reason why dove-sellers, money-changers, priests, and temple officials should be driven pell-mell out of precincts they had come to look upon as their own, except that they were overawed by the stern majesty of this wonderful Galilean. For a brief hour Jesus was master of the situation; the next day He was arrested. The thing had to be done secretly and quickly, but those who planned it calculated rightly. No sooner was Jesus made a prisoner than the populace turned against Him and clamoured for His destruction. Those who know something of mob psychology will readily understand this. Human passion easily swings from adoration to hate, as history has shown over and over again. If a strong man fails in a conflict of forces in a time of great public excitement, he is rarely allowed to sink quietly into oblivion; the mob turns upon him with the savagery of a wild beast. Napoleon was one day driving through the streets of Paris amid cheering crowds. One of his suite remarked to him that it must be

gratifying to see how his subjects loved him. "Bah!" said the Emperor. "The same rabble would cheer just as madly if I were going to the guillotine." He was right. It was just the same with this Jerusalem crowd. The populace thought that the Jesus who had seemed so strong was not so strong after all, and therefore their base fury vented itself upon Him just as priests and Pharisees had foreseen.

These were the immediate causes of the death of Jesus. His execution was a judicial murder done to gratify sacerdotal spite and popular passion, and the men who took part in it were guilty of what has proved to be the blackest deed in history. The same type of man exists to-day, as he has existed in every age, and if Jesus came again without saying who He was, history would repeat itself. I do not suppose His enemies would nail Him on a wooden cross —public opinion would forbid that now, thanks to nineteen centuries of His gospel—but they would find some means of making Him suffer, and they would invoke His own name to justify them in doing it.

But is this all that can be said about the matter? Where does God come in? Why was a crime of this sort ever permitted? Why has the memory of it actually become a religious dogma? Other people have been put to death quite as unjustly, and the results, though great, are not to be compared with those which have followed

The reason why there was no supernatural interference.

from the death of Jesus. Why is this? As we have already seen, the popular view of the doctrine of Atonement presumes that this foul deed was in some way, as the Scripture has it, "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Was it really so? Was the whole dreadful drama merely a programme to be gone through in all its appointed stages, ending with the cry of the victim, "It is finished"?

There is one sense, and only one, in which such a deed can be said to have been by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and that is that God did not interfere to save Jesus from the last dread ordeal. He allowed wickedness to do its worst, and thereby made the disinterested nobleness of the character of Jesus all the clearer. In such a time as that in which Jesus lived, such a life as His was sure to end on a Calvary of some kind, unless He ran away from it, or God supernaturally intervened to save Him. Neither event happened. If Jesus had shrunk from the full consequences of His actions; if He had temporized, concealed Himself, tried to gain time, or adopted any other subterfuge or expedient in order to save His life, that life would not have the moral power it possesses, or shine with such glorious lustre in the world to-day. Supernatural interference would have dimmed the moral beauty of the faith, courage, and perfect self-devotion of Jesus. The moral worth of any act of self-sacrifice, no matter on what scale it is performed, is dependent

upon the fact that it is done without regard to consequences. If we could see with absolute clearness the sure and certain result of any action; if we could know, as unquestionably as that two and two make four, that it would always pay to do the right thing, the very soul of goodness would have gone out of it. It is just because we do not know, save with the deeper knowledge that contradicts appearances —the knowledge that is rightly termed faith— that an unselfish action is in accord with the general rightness of the universe, and therefore must prevail in the end, that there is anything praiseworthy in it. The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God were that this should be fully demonstrated in the experience of Jesus, as it has been in the experience of many a one of His followers since. Once more, therefore, we come to the last word of the cosmos—manifestation by sacrifice; and the experience of Jesus is the sum and centre of it all. The reason why the name of Jesus has such power in the world to-day is because a perfectly noble and unselfish life was crowned by a perfectly sacrificial death. Both were needed; either without the other would have been incomplete. Many a British soldier has died as brave a death as Jesus, but none have ever lived the life of Jesus. The life and death together were a perfect self-offering, the offering of the unit to the whole, the individual to the race, the Son to the Father, and therefore the greatest manifestation of the

innermost of God that has ever been made to the world.

It makes the sacrifice unreal to speak of it as though Jesus knew the end from the beginning and foresaw every stage in the programme before He came to it. He did not; He shrank from the shameful end just as we should have done, and prayed to God to save Him from it. An immense amount of pious nonsense has been spoken and written about our Lord's agony in Gethsemane. We have been told that in this dreadful hour the sorrow of Jesus bore no relation to His physical death, but was caused by His mysterious self-identification with all the sins of mankind, past, present, and to come. To add to the horror, God the Father turned His face away from Him, treating Him as though He were indeed the embodiment of all the guilt of mankind, the scapegoat driven into the wilderness. I have never been able to read this kind of thing without an inner protest against the unreality of it; it precludes the possibility of understanding Jesus or entering sympathetically into an experience in which, to a greater or less degree, every noble soul has sooner or later to share with Him. The only way to explain Gethsemane is to approach it from the purely human point of view as we have already done with the causes which led up to the crucifixion. Let us try to put ourselves in the Sufferer's place, a perfectly legitimate and right thing to do. How would any of us have felt in the

circumstances of Jesus? Suppose that you had laboured consistently and whole-heartedly, in season and out of season, to get men to realize their Divine sonship and live the life that is life indeed. Suppose you had seen your hopes perish one by one, and that materialism, selfishness, and hypocrisy seemed to have become all the stronger for your protest. Suppose you saw evil gathering head against you, that you found yourself left utterly alone, and that even God seemed to be silent in this hour of tragic failure. Here are your enemies triumphant at the gate thirsting for your blood. Beyond that gate betrayal, torture, and public shame are waiting for you. In the background of all stands the cruel gibbet to which your own countrymen, the people you have loved with an all-absorbing love, shall presently commit you. Tell me what you would pray in like circumstances. Your agony would be just as great as that of Jesus, though perhaps your prayer would lack His magnificent faith and ungrudging self-surrender. Jesus went to His death having nothing to rely upon except His inner conviction that God and the cause of truth were one, and that somehow or other in the end that would be made plain to Himself and all the world. It would have been the same no matter what had been the particular death that Jesus died. His murderers might have taken His life in any one of a thousand ways, and the ultimate result would have been just as we see it now.

They might have hanged, drowned, or burnt Him, in which case the stake or the hangman's rope would have become the symbol of the world's redemption, but, after the fashion of their time, they crucified Him; it was the worst they could do, and they wanted to do the worst. At Calvary perfect love joined issue with perfect hate, perfect goodness with perfect wickedness, and became victorious by enduring the worst and remaining pure and unchanged to the last.

The moral outcome.

But it was not the last, after all; the world had still to reckon with God. That life and death have become a moral force, a spiritual dynamic greater than any before or since, just because of the completeness of the self-offering that culminated on Calvary's cross. I must not anticipate what I have to say about the resurrection further than to remark that more came out of the tomb of Jesus than ever went into it. When all seemed lost, this buried life arose in power in other lives that up till then had never fully known its Divine greatness and spiritual beauty.

This is the truth about the death of Jesus, and nothing needs to be added to show how great an event in the dealings of God with men it must have been. It was both simple and sublime. Theological word-spinning only serves to obscure its true significance. Show to the world the real Jesus; tell men how it came about that He had to die, and they cannot help but love Him.

CHAPTER IX

THE ATONEMENT (*continued*)

II. SEMITIC IDEAS OF ATONEMENT

WHAT, then, has this death to do with the Atonement? A great deal; but the best way to answer the question will be to obtain a clear idea as to what the Atonement really means and always has meant to Christian experience, notwithstanding the tortuous ways in which the doctrine has been articulated. I am convinced that underneath every genuine attempt to explain the Atonement, which has ever held the field for any length of time in Christian history, the same truth is always to be found. It is so even with the statement of it which is supposed to be orthodox to-day, but which is quite modern after all, and is practically discredited by all thoughtful minds. The mental dialect changes from one generation to another, but truth does not. As a matter of fact, statements of truth are but conventional symbols at the best, and possess only the ethical and emotional value associated with them in our minds. This is why venerable propositions, which seem obscurantist to us, originally

Atonement in history.

possessed vital significance to their framers; the ethical and emotional content were greater than the form of statement, as they always must be. Every one of my readers is no doubt aware of the power possessed by some particular landscape or piece of music to awaken certain emotions in the heart, or bring back the memory of certain events to the mind. The same scene or song might not do this for any one else, because the associations are different. It is much the same with the forms in which religious truth is stated from age to age. The form is no more the truth than the landscape is the emotion or recollection it excites; it is only a symbol for the truth. To grasp this clearly should not only make us more tolerant of archaic confessions of faith, but should help us to realize that truth is one even under apparently contradictory forms of statement. It is our duty in religion, as in everything else, to endeavour to express the content of spiritual experience in the forms which best accord with the mental dialect of our own day. I repeat, therefore, that underneath every one of the principal forms of statement in which the doctrine of Atonement has been presented in the past, the same truth is to be found. It is an interesting historical and psychological study to try to find out what it is.

As I have already said above, it is usual for writers on the Atonement to begin by taking Scripture for granted, and presenting an examination of the principal passages in which the

Atonement is thought to be presumed or declared. But if what I have just said be true, we have to get behind even the language of Scripture, and ask how the writers of the Old and New Testaments came to use these particular symbols, and what they originally meant. The word "Atonement" is not an exact translation of any one Old Testament term, but connotes a group of related religious ideas. In its Christian use other elements enter into it from Greek thought which are not to be found in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament source of the ideas, as well as the term, is much older than the Greek, and therefore we are right in looking to the Old Testament for the origin of the doctrine which has taken such an important place in Christianity. But here again modern research has opened up an enormous field of investigation. Israel was a member of a vast family of nations, all of which had sprung from one stock, and of which the Babylonians and Assyrians were the most powerful representatives. The Israelites were, politically speaking, a comparatively insignificant folk, surrounded by mighty empires which had attained a high degree of civilization. The excavations which are now proceeding in Oriental lands, especially the territories occupied by ancient Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt, are bringing much valuable and interesting matter to light. We find that the civilization of these peoples was much older than up to now scholars

Atonement in the Old Testament.

have believed. The communities inhabiting the land of Canaan, for example, had developed a complex political and commercial organization long before the Israelitish invasion; Canaan was, in fact, the highway along which passed the commerce of Egypt with the mighty nations to the north. The painstaking efforts of expert explorers are bringing vast forgotten literatures to light, and reconstituting for us the religious ideas and modes of life of these people of the ancient world. One result of these researches has been to prove that Hebrew religious ideas were closely allied to those of other Semitic peoples, and even the way in which they were expressed owed not a little to older civilizations. In nothing was this more clearly the case than with the ideas included afterwards in the doctrine of Atonement. The word translated "Atonement" in our version of the Old Testament Scriptures played an important part in the Old Testament sacrificial system, and this, again, was closely connected with Semitic modes of worship in general.

The Day of Atonement.

There was one great day in the Jewish religious year, called the Day of Atonement, when a special ritual was gone through and special offerings made to God on account of the sins of the people as a whole. The ceremonial was very elaborate, and the occasion was observed with great solemnity by the whole nation. As described in the Old Testament, the prescriptions for this day of

Atonement, the Good Friday of the Levitical system as it has been called, probably owe a good deal to Babylonian influences. It should be remembered that the outstanding event in later Jewish history was the carrying away of the flower of the nation by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon, where they remained for more than two generations. It is quite likely that, in spite of their exclusiveness and their hatred of their conquerors, the Jews may have borrowed some of their religious ritual from the Babylonians; but, whether they did or not, the ideas underlying their respective modes of worship were much the same. Primitive religious sacrifice among Semitic peoples appears to have been mainly of a joyous character. Worship and sacrifice went hand in hand. The worshippers were accustomed to offer to their gods sacrifices of everything which the votaries themselves valued, the fruits of the earth, their material possessions, their flocks and herds, the prisoners they had taken in war, and occasionally even the children of their own body. It was only on great and solemn occasions, such as the necessity for staying a pestilence or averting defeat in war, that the offering of the more terrible kinds of sacrifice was made. It would be instructive, therefore, for us to inquire what were the underlying ideas assumed in Semitic religious sacrifice.

In the first place, there was the idea of community of life between the worshipper and his god. It is doubtful how far this can be pressed,

but it is clear that in the Semitic mind there was always a conviction that the deity of the clan or tribe was the giver as well as the sustainer of its life. This did not apply to the minor divinities, the demons of wood and stream, but to the tribal deities, the Chemosh of Moab, the Dagon of the Philistines, the Jehovah of Israel. Probably the Philistines were not Semites, but no doubt ancient worship in general took for granted this community of life between any particular people and their deity. In the offering of the best of their possessions to the god, the worshippers thought they were rendering to him of his own. As he was at once the giver and the guardian of life, they felt bound to render him the best of the fruits of life. This was a true thought, a principle essential to all true spiritual life, and implied in all spiritual aspiration. The reader will have already seen that it is fundamental to the New Theology. However crude and even repellent some of its expressions may have been in ancient modes of worship, it is the same truth all ages through, the truth that God and man are essentially one.

Underlying ideas in Semitic sacrifice. (i.) The solidarity of man with God.

A further idea underlying primitive sacrifice was that of the solidarity of the individual with the community as a whole. In the Chaldean tribes, out of which Israel arose, personality, as we know it, had not even emerged. Readers of the Old Testament will not need to be

reminded that in the earlier stages of Israel's existence as a people, the whole nation was repeatedly said to be punished for the behaviour of individuals; and families perished for the transgression of a father, as in the case of Achan. No particular attention was ever paid to the individual as such. A man had no life of his own, and no value, apart from the life of the community. He belonged to it, not to himself. Hence, when any communal act of worship was performed, when any tribal sacrifice was made to the deity, the organic unity of the individual with the whole was specially emphasized. Physically and spiritually the unit was held to belong to the whole and to exist for the sake of the whole. Here again we have a great truth, the foundation truth of all morality, and a truth which reaches its highest in the life of Jesus. The deepening of individual self-consciousness and the increased perception of individual value have neither weakened nor destroyed it, for it is written in the very constitution of the universe. Mankind is fundamentally one; here is morality. We are individually fulfilled in God; here is religion. These are the cognate ideas underlying all modes of sacrificial worship, ancient or modern. These are the ideas which find elaborate ceremonial expression in the Israelitish Day of Atonement as described in the Old Testament. The main purpose of these observances was the desire to assert as solemnly and

(ii.) The solidarity of the individual with the community.

emphatically as possible the essential oneness of the community with God, and of every individual with all the rest. Everything which tended to separate between Israel and her God was ceremonially put away on this great occasion. From the religious point of view it was the beginning of a new year. The Babylonian new year began about the same time. It was supposed that a man's good or evil fortune was appointed on New Year's Day, and settled past all possibility of revision on the tenth day after. The intervening nine days were therefore kept as a sort of Lenten season; the tenth day was the grand occasion for making sure of the harmonious relations of the community with the deity. It will be seen, therefore, that psychologically the idea of Atonement takes precedence of the idea of sin. Most Westerners are accustomed to think exactly the reverse, and that is why the various theories of Atonement which have appeared and disappeared in the course of Christian history have so generally obscured the truth. The root principle of Atonement is not that of escaping punishment for transgression, but the assertion of the fundamental oneness of God and man. This may or may not be accompanied by feelings of guilt and contrition, but it is the very marrow of religion. Atonement implies the acting together of God and man, the subordination of the individual will to the universal will, the fulfilment of the unit in the whole.

It ought to be recognized that in Semitic modes of worship the idea of sin did not originally hold the place it has since come to hold in the Christian consciousness. The Babylonian and the early Israelite were greatly afraid of offending God, but they do not seem to have thought of such a transgression as being morally culpable. The profound sense of sin which characterizes so many of the Psalms and prophetic writings of the Old Testament was a comparatively late development. The primitive Semites had a markedly anthropomorphic idea of their deities. They thought of any Divine being as more or less like an ordinary man, and liable to take umbrage at little things. It was even possible to offend him without knowing it, and therefore to be left without protection against the ills of life. It was to make sure of smoothing away all possible misunderstandings that covering sacrifices were offered from time to time; but the offering of these sacrifices did not necessarily mean that the worshipper thought he had done anything to be ashamed of and which required to be put right. He was simply treating his god as he would have treated a powerful earthly patron or potentate—that is, he was apologizing for anything he might have done to alienate his favour. This notion of the necessity for placating God is to be found in close association with the worthier spiritual instincts to which I have already referred, and it has not even yet

Sense of sin not originally essential to atonement.

disappeared from our thinking. Unbiassed readers of the Old Testament will find abundant justification for this statement. We are told repeatedly therein that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel or against this or that individual, and that the whole community had in consequence to humble itself before Him in order to avert plague, or pestilence, or some other form of general calamity. Not only was Jehovah thought of as a kind of larger man who was at once protector and tyrant to his people; He was but the God of Israel in contradistinction to the gods of other nations, one God out of many. It was only gradually, and after the lapse of ages, that Israelites came to think of their God as the God of the whole earth, and a being who must be worshipped in righteousness. Israel was fortunate in possessing what other nations had not in the same degree, a succession of specially inspired men, teachers of moral and spiritual truth called prophets. The best of these —for no doubt the generality of them spoke only the language of their time—earnestly protested against material ideas of sacrifice and inadequate notions about God. They declared that God and the moral ideal were one, and that the best way to serve the former was to be true to the latter. True sacrifice, they maintained, was of a spiritual kind, and ought never to be thought about in any other sense. Thus in the fifty-first Psalm the writer, one of the prophetic school, thus contrasts mere ceremonialism with spiritual worship:—

> "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Or take the prophet Micah, chap. vi. ver. 6. Here is a reference to human sacrifice, to which the Israelites were prone from time to time, following the example of their neighbours :—

> "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings of calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

And the answer of the prophet is—

> "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Here we have a declaration in unmistakable terms that the moral ideal and the religious ideal are one, and that to worship God properly the worshipper must treat his fellow-men properly. We now get the idea that sin against God is not something into which a man may fall without knowing it, but the living of a selfish life.

We ought to recognize, too, that the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were never held to secure

a complete amnesty for all kinds of sin. If a man committed theft or murder he had to bear the appropriate penalty of his misdemeanour, because he had been guilty of an action directed against the well-being of the community, and the community had to take measures to protect itself; the Day of Atonement availed nothing in such a case. Here is where many who see in the Old Testament sacrificial system a type and anticipation of the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus, frequently go wide of the facts. The Day of Atonement was a ceremonial and symbolical assertion of the willingness of the individual and the nation to fulfil their true destiny by being at one with God. If some particular man had been so living as to cut himself off from the communal well-being, he had to suffer.

Atonement never an equivalent for penalty.

Many people seem to think that some actual saving efficacy was supposed to attach to the shedding of the blood of the victims offered on the altar of sacrifice, but that never was so. No doubt in the ignorant popular mind material sacrifices came to be looked upon as possessing some virtue in themselves, but the intelligence of the nation never regarded them in this way. In the offering of a victim the worshipper symbolically offered himself. The Semites thought that the life of any organism was in the blood. Thus in Numbers we read, "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh

The significance of the blood.

atonement by reason of the soul (or life)." When, therefore, a man offered the blood of a victim upon the altar, he was symbolically declaring his recognition of the truth that the individual life belongs to the whole, and must give or pour itself out to the common life and to God the source of all. Only in this way could individuality realize itself; apart from the whole it was meaningless and valueless.

This helps us to see how, even underneath the most horrible and repellent modes of ancient religious sacrifice, there was something essentially great and noble. When a heathen mother passed her child through the fire to Moloch, did the sacrifice cost her nothing? To be sure it did. It must have been much harder to give her baby than to give herself. She did it because she had been taught to believe that to give one's best and dearest possession for the life of the whole, was an action acceptable to God and worthy of our relationship to Him. We have deepened and purified that ideal, but we have not lost it; we never can. As time went on men came to see that there was a higher way of giving the self to the whole than that of immolating a physical life, and a better way of symbolizing that offering than by shedding the blood of bulls and goats; but the essential truth beneath all the intricate sacrificial systems of ancient Israel and her neighbours is one that can never perish.

The truth beneath all sacrifice, however barbarous.

To sum up. Atonement is the assertion of

the fundamental unity of all existence, the unity of the individual with the race and the race with God. The individual can only realise that unity by sacrificing himself to it. To fulfil the self we must give the self to the All. This is the truth presumed in all ancient ideas of Atonement. The idea of placating a man-like God for offences committed against his dignity has been a concomitant of this perception, even a hindrance to it, but has never wholly obscured the truth itself. That truth is constant and essential to all religion and morality, and is the co-ordinating principle between them.

CHAPTER X

THE ATONEMENT (*continued*)

III. The Doctrine in Christian History and Experience

From what has now been said it will, I hope, be clear that the roots of the Christian doctrine of Atonement lie far back in history, especially Semitic history mediated through the Old Testament, and that its fundamental truth is one with which the world can never dispense. Nothing worth doing in human history has ever been done apart from it or ever will be. It is no paradox to say that even a morally earnest agnostic believes in the Atonement; at any rate, he believes in the all-essential truth without which there would never have been such a thing as a doctrine of Atonement.

Antiquity of the essential truth.

But now we come to the consideration of this truth as it has passed over into Christianity. I do not propose to give an accurate and exhaustive analysis of the principal things that have been said about it, from the writings of St. Paul downwards; that would only be wearisome to my readers, and

No consistent theory in the New Testament.

lead to no particular result. But if I have succeeded in making clear the psychological necessity for the existence of the idea of Atonement, it will serve us as a guiding principle when we come to consider it in relation to the sacrifice of Jesus. Many exegetes have undertaken to show that the various New Testament writers held one and the same theory of the relation of the death of Jesus to the forgiveness of sins; never was a task more hopeless. The Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine theories, and that of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, are not mutually consistent, and Paul is not always consistent with himself. The principal thing they have in common is their belief that the death of Jesus was of vital efficacy in the doing away of sin. The symbolism in which they set forth this truth is borrowed mainly from the Old Testament, and we have already seen what underlay that symbolism even in its earliest use. Old Testament language about sacrifice supplies the mental dialect of the New, and now that we have the key to it we need neither be puzzled nor misled by it. Beneath all that the New Testament writers have to say about the death of Jesus, there is the same grand old spiritual truth of Atonement which makes religion possible. Before we resume our examination of the connection between the death of Jesus and the doing away of sin, let us look for a moment at what post-apostolic thought has had to say about it.

From the beginning of the second century onwards the Fathers of the Church and their theological successors attempted a variety of explanations of the way in which the death of Jesus achieved potentially the redemption of mankind. It is not easy to say just when one period of Christian thought closes and another begins; but, broadly speaking, we can for convenience classify them into the period of the Fathers, the mediæval period, the Reformation and afterwards up to the eighteenth century, and the period of modern thought. The Fathers may be divided into two groups, the ante-Nicene and post-Nicene writers, and also into the Greek and Latin Fathers. But as I am not writing for theological students, I will not attempt any further analysis of the various patristic schools. Those who wrote previous to 325 A.D. belong to the ante-Nicene group; those who wrote after that date, to the post-Nicene group. The ante-Nicene writers, generally speaking, avoid giving any theory of the Atonement at all, but two of their greatest thinkers, Origen and Irenæus, held that mankind had fallen under the dominion of Satan, and that Jesus, by His sufferings, paid a ransom to Satan in order that we might be freed from his power. Post-Nicene Fathers, for the most part, adopted this view without attempting to justify it. Amongst their statements we find the ideas that the Atonement was a ransom to Satan and also a sacrifice to God, but they offer no explanation

The Fathers.

of the necessity of either. Later on Augustine anticipated subsequent Christian thought by maintaining that the atoning work of Jesus was part of an eternal purpose.

The Scholasticism of the Middle Ages finds its first important expression in the illustrious Anselm, an acute thinker and a beautiful soul. Anselm rejected the idea of a ransom to Satan, declaring that Satan had no rights over humanity; in place of this notion he put forward the theory that Jesus made to God an infinite satisfaction for an infinite debt. According to this theory, the majesty of God had suffered indignity because of human sin, and yet man was unable by himself to offer an adequate satisfaction for the offence. Hence, the eternal Son of God became man in order that He might offer the only satisfaction that could be considered adequate. This theory did not go unchallenged. Abelard, for example, asked the very reasonable question how the guilt of mankind could be atoned for by the greater guilt of those who put Jesus to death. Abelard's famous opponent, Bernard of Clairvaux, also repudiated Anselm's main contention, and fell back upon the theory of a satisfaction to Satan.

Anselm and after.

At the time of the Reformation the question of the Atonement formed the subject of considerable controversy, and, on the whole, the Reformers were less reasonable than the Catholics, as is the case to some extent

Reformation theories.

even to-day. The Roman Catholic doctrine of Atonement is a much better statement of the truth than conventional Protestant statements about the "finished work," and so on. One considerable section of sixteenth-century Protestantism held and taught the doctrine of the total depravity of human nature, and insisted on the idea that Jesus bore the actual penal sufferings of sinners. Calvinists held that these sufferings had value for the elect only. Against these views Socinianism arose as a protest, but tended to reduce the passion of Jesus to a sort of drama enacted by God in the presence of humanity in order to excite men's contrition and win their love.

Modern evangelical thought has done very little with all these theories except to make them impossible; it has no consistent and reasonable explanation to put in their place. The popular kind of evangelical phraseology is that which continues to represent Jesus as having borne the punishment due to human sin; salvation is spoken of as though it meant deliverance from the post-mortem consequences of misdoing.

The modern lack of a theory.

In all these theories it is evident that, in the minds of their framers, the death of Jesus is closely connected with the forgiveness of sin, and that the forgiveness of sin is the vital element in the Atonement. In order to understand the truth about this, let us return to what has already been said on the subject of sin, and pursue it a little further. I have already pointed

More about sin.

out that sin is selfishness, pure and simple, and that definition will cover all its manifestations. There is no sin that is not selfishness; there is no selfishness that is not sin. All possible activities of the soul are between selfishness on the one hand and love on the other. If people would only accept this simple explanation of a great subject, it would get rid of most of the confusion of thought that exists in regard to it. The life of love is the life lived for impersonal ends; the sinful life is the life lived for self alone. The life of love is the life which does the best with the self for the sake of the whole; the sinful life is the life which is lived for the self at the expense of the whole. The desire for gratification at some one else's cost, or at the cost of the common life, is the root principle of sin. Sin against God is an offence against the common life; it is attempting to draw away from, instead of ministering to, the common good. The sinful man thinks it will pay him to be selfish; his impulse is to suppose that he can gain more happiness, can drink more deeply of the cup of life, by doing it at the expense of other people. We all do it more or less, and yet the world might have learned by this time that selfishness does *not* pay; the thoroughly selfish man is an unhappy man, for he has not drawn upon the source of abiding joy. Like love, selfishness is a quest for life; but whereas love obtains more abundant life by freely giving itself, sin loses hold on life by trying to grab

and keep it. Every man is seeking life, and seeking it in one or other of these opposite ways; he is either fulfilling the self by serving the whole, or he is trying to feed the self by robbing the whole. But life is God, and there is no life which is not God. God is the life all-abundant, the life infinite and eternal, the life that never grows old, the life that is joy. Every man, consciously or sub-consciously, wants that life; he is wanting it all the time. Why does the man of business spend so many hours in his office in the effort to make money? It is because money represents power—power that can purchase "more life and fuller." Probably he does not want it all for himself; he works for love of his family or love of the community, and his desire to serve them makes his work gladder, so that already he has more abundant life than he would otherwise possess. Analyze any human action, no matter what, and it will be seen to point in one or other of these two directions, self-ward or all-ward. If the former, it will shrivel the soul, it makes for death; if the latter, it will expand the soul, it makes for life. This is a spiritual law which knows no exception; in the long run the loving deed brings larger life and joy, the selfish deed brings pain and darkness. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap eternal life."

It is evident from the foregoing that even the sinful life is a quest for God, although it does not know itself to be such; for in seeking life saint and sinner alike are seeking God, the all-embracing life. And the sinner *must* learn that to seek life selfishly is to lose it; to seek it unselfishly is both to gain and to give it. The good man and the bad man are seeking the same thing in opposite ways.

During the recent New Theology controversy, the editor of the *British Weekly*, in the course of an attack upon my teaching, printed a number of extracts from my sermons in order to convince his readers that that teaching was objectionable and false. In every case the extract was carefully removed from its context, and therefore conveyed quite a misleading impression to the mind of the reader. One of these extracts was from a sermon on More Abundant Life, preached in the City Temple on Sunday morning, March 18, 1906. As this extract has been widely circulated, perhaps I may be pardoned for giving it here along with the context. All that the editor chose to print was a part of the paragraph in which sin was described as a quest for God; and yet he must have known perfectly well that to take that paragraph out of its setting was to do an injustice both to the preacher and to the subject.

> "Observe the sharp antithesis between the 'thief or the robber' on the one hand, and the 'Good Shepherd' on the other.

These two stand for two opposing tendencies that have run through all nature and all human life. All nature through, all history through, two conflicting tendencies have been discernible. These are ever at war, and they ever will be until the whole world has been subdued to Christ, and is filled with the fulness of the life of God. These two tendencies we may describe as the deathward and the lifeward respectively. The words are not very satisfactory, because the deathward tendency masquerades as the lifeward tendency, and the lifeward tendency, before fruition, looks like the deathward one. In nature, as Rom. viii. tells us, 'We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.' Nature is cruel, 'red in tooth and claw.' The deathward tendency is what I may call the selfward tendency in the upward struggle of all organic forms—that is, one organism only exists at the expense of other organisms. Yet at a certain stage in evolution this principle of the survival of the fittest at the expense of the rest gives way to a counter principle, that of the fitting of as many as possible to survive. The thief tendency gives way to the Shepherd tendency, self-love to mother-love, the struggle to survive to the struggle for the life of others. I do not pause at the moment to account for these two antithetic tendencies: there they are; all through the history of this sad old world of ours these two tendencies have been in sharp conflict. Both are cosmic, both probably resolvable in that higher unity which is too mysterious for us to penetrate, but to our minds they are in flagrant opposition to

each other. The thief cometh to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; mother-love, Christ-love, that it may give life, and that more abundantly.

"In human history the antithesis is even more plainly marked. From one point of view history is little else than the story of the crimes and follies of mankind. If it were entirely that, the study would be too saddening to enter upon; but it is not all of that character, and yet it is sufficiently so to cast a shadow over the optimism of any man who investigates human evolution as told in song and story. The principle that 'they should take who have the power, and they should keep who can,' has ruled in human concerns from the dawn of history until to-day. It is strong enough in our midst even now. Our industrial system is founded upon it, and is essentially unchristian. Commercialism is saturated with it; all men suffer from it, but often they know not how to get free from it. Ruskin has a grimly amusing paragraph on the parallel between an earlier civilization and that of to-day, and the identity in principle of the selfward tendency in both. In mediæval times, as he would say, the robber baron was wont to possess himself of a mountain fortress, whence he swooped down upon hapless passers-by to rob them of their possessions and their lives: To-day the successful financial magnate does the same by effecting corners in corn and suchlike. The great writer adds, with characteristic irony, 'I prefer the crag baron to the bag baron.' Yet with all this we see at work in history another tendency which we can recognize as

plainly as the former, but which fills us with great hope for the future of humanity; it is that which is summed up in the one word 'Christ.' That word stands all the world over for the things that make for more abundant life. Just as in the text the word 'thief' stands for everything that makes for separateness, selfhood, cruelty, so the word 'Christ' stands for everything that makes for union, mutual helpfulness, brotherly kindness. The thief stands for the tendency to grasp and draw inward, and the Christ stands for the tendency to give and live outward. The former tendency is what I call the deathward—deathward for all else but itself; and the Christ is the lifeward—life for all else but itself. Yet—curious inversion of earlier experience—the deathward tendency results in death to itself in the spiritual region, and the lifeward tendency results in life to him who gives life. 'I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' I want you to realize here, then, that the Christ in humanity is the life-giver of the soul. They who are possessed of the Christ spirit are they who have and can give the more abundant life.

"We have briefly examined the two tendencies of which I have spoken; have you realized that in the things of the spirit the deathward tendency is what we call sin? Sin is selfishness, it is the attempt to misuse the energies of God; it is the expansion of individuality at the expense of the race. I do not know that you can arrive at a much more thorough explanation of the nature of sin than that. Men blunderingly attempt to classify virtues, and think of sin

as simply the failure to attain them. It is not that, it is something deeper; sin is the attempt to minister to self at the expense of that which is outside self. It lives by death to others, or seeks to do so.

"When I was away a few weeks ago, I paid a visit to Monte Carlo to see what it was like, and went into the famous gambling saloon, and stood for a while looking at the faces of the players. I could not see anything very different from what I see now; the people who were engaged in that all-engrossing pursuit might have been in church, they were so quiet, so orderly, and so apparently passionless. Yet I felt—it may have been a preacher's prejudice—that the moral atmosphere of that place was one in which I did not want to remain, there was something bad there; and I think I could discern what it was. The gambler is essentially a man who is trying to get something for nothing; he is drawing to himself that which he supposes will give him more satisfying and abundant life. Let who will suffer, it is not his concern. What is lifeward for him may be deathward for them; he is willing that it should be so—that is the sin. Sin is always a mistake, a soul's mistake; it is the carrying up into the spiritual region of that stern and terrible law of the physical world, the survival of an organism at the expense of its fellow. That law is reversed in the spiritual world; it is replaced by something else. If a soul is to gain more abundant life, it must rise above the desire to grasp and hold. The gambler is selling that beautiful thing which came fresh from the hand of God, and is at once God's life and his; he is

destroying the present possibility of attaining to that higher life which is the destiny of the soul. The Christ in him can find no expression. And yet, my friends, realize this, however startling it may seem, sin itself is a quest for God—a blundering quest, but a quest for all that. The man who got dead drunk last night did so because of the impulse within him to break through the barriers of his limitations, to express himself, and to realize more abundant life. His self-indulgence just came to that: he wanted, if only for a brief hour, to live the larger life, to expand the soul, to enter untrodden regions, and gather to himself new experience. That drunken debauch was a quest for life, a quest for God. Men in their sinful follies to-day, and their blank atheism, and their foul blasphemies, their trampling upon things that are beautiful and good, are engaged in this dim, blundering quest for God, whom to know is life eternal. The *roué* you saw in Piccadilly last night, who went out to corrupt innocence and to wallow in filthiness of the flesh, was engaged in his blundering quest for God. He is looking for Him along the line of the wrong tendency; he has been gathering to himself what he took to be more abundant life, 'but sin, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth death'—death to the sinner as well as to his victim, death of what is deepest and truest in the soul. Yet—I repeat it—all men are seeking life—life more abundant, even in their selfishness and wrong-doing, seeking life by the deathward road.

> "'Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
> No life that breathes with human breath
> Has ever truly longed for death.

'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
O life, not death, for which we pant,
More life and fuller that I want.'"

On the following Sunday I preached a sermon entitled "The Nature of Sin," also published in the *Examiner*, in which the same point was re-emphasized with even greater distinctness, as the following extract will show:—

"I think I startled some of you last Sunday morning when I happened to remark that sin was, after all, a quest for God—a mistaken quest, but none the less a quest for God, for all that. I want to explain to you to-night somewhat more in detail what I mean by this, because the more clearly we can see the truth, the more clearly we can perceive sin to be a soul's blunder. There are two tendencies discernible throughout nature and in human history. These two tendencies are essentially opposed, are ever in conflict, and ever will be until the whole world is subdued to Christ, and God is all in all. I called them last Sunday morning from the pulpit the deathward and the lifeward respectively. The terms are not very satisfactory, because the deathward tendency usually masquerades as the lifeward, and the lifeward often looks like the deathward. That is why sin is ever possible. A man thinks to get something by it, and though he finds out his mistake afterwards, yet he supposes it to be for him the lifeward road. On the other hand, the utterly unselfish deed often looks as though it were a deed that would bring destruction upon the doer. Not so. Jesus Christ saw right to the heart of things

when He said, 'He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake the same shall find it.' If you substitute for the words 'for My sake,' 'for truth's sake,' or 'for life's sake,' you will get just the same meaning—'He that keeps back his life shall lose it, and he that gives forth his life shall find it.'

"Here, then, are two tendencies sharply contrasted. Now observe their operation in nature and in human experience. You are all aware of, and frequently have been saddened, no doubt, by, what you regard as the cruelty of nature. There is a tragedy under every rose-leaf, there is unceasing conflict to the death going on in every hedgerow. Nature is indeed cruel. I have often watched, during this winter which is now drawing to a close, the little birds feeding outside the window of my breakfast-room in the morning. Like many of you, we put out a few crumbs for these feathered friends who share the same garden with ourselves, and I have always noticed that there is a battle-royal fought round those crumbs. There is enough for every one, and yet the instinct of these little creatures is to try and grab and keep all, each one for itself. The instinct of the lower creation appears to be that a form can only preserve itself, and only expand and express itself, at the expense of other forms. It is a stern and terrible law, as you well know. Forms, by a slow, upward progress in the unfolding of the purpose for which nature exists, have become what they are at the expense of earlier and weaker forms. There is a tendency to grasp and hold, a tendency to kill and to destroy, and this, to

some minds, appears to be the strongest tendency in nature or in man. I question it—in fact, I deny it—and I want that you and I should arrive at the same conclusion respecting it. For there is another tendency observable, working from the very earliest, throughout the processes of nature, too. It is that which Henry Drummond describes as the struggle for the life of others. If you like, we will call it mother-love. I saw it illustrated only yesterday. A mother sheep, standing in her place amongst the flock, was surprised with the rest at the incursion of a mongrel dog. The flock fled instantly, but the ordinarily timid mother stood her ground. The reason was not far to seek. There was a little lamb cowering behind her, and she, overcoming her natural instinct of self-preservation, turned her face to the dog to draw his attention, if possible, to herself and deflect it from her young one. Now, that instinct represents the tendency of which I speak, the antithetic tendency to the other already described. It is the stronger of the two. It indicates the goal toward which Nature herself is moving. 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,' but mother-love is a prophecy of a higher yet to be. It is the forth-going instinct, the all-ward, lifeward tendency.

"Now turn to humanity. I think you will agree with me that right through human history the same two tendencies are observable. The further back we go, the stronger seems the selfward tendency. The natural state of uncivilized man is a state of war. Man in primitive communities only exists

and flourishes by destroying other communities. A most curious thing it is, too, that apparently our domestic and civic virtues have grown out of this state of war. A man used to carry his wife off by main force. She became his property. He exerted his brute force; he magnified his own personality, as it were, in crushing other personalities. His children were in his hands for life and death. If he afterwards learned to love them, it was in contradistinction to the children that were not his. That which was his, so to speak, gratified his egotism; and, although a more beautiful relationship grew out of it, such was the unpromising beginning. To-day when you hear a man speaking loudly about "*my* country," or "*my* family," or "*my* society," as the case may be, you may be perfectly sure that he is projecting himself into his patriotism, or into his loyalty to family or society; and indeed this was the lowly beginning of what has come to be an excellent virtue. We have had to learn benevolence by concentrating unselfish attention upon the few rather than the many. The further back you go in history, the sterner does the operation of that law appear, and the less promising the future of mankind. If people tell me the world is not getting better, I suggest that it might be worth their while to read a chapter of mediæval or primitive history. In the Odyssey, for instance, Homer sketches for us the career of a strong and remarkable man. His hero, supposed to be a paragon of virtue, is capable of things you would call scoundrelism to-day. He and his band of storm-tossed companions land upon an

island of the Grecian archipelago and find a city there. They promptly sack it and kill all the inhabitants—men, women, and children. It seemed to be the proper thing to do, and found its way into verse, and they boasted about such heroic exploits. It was brutal murder, and the men who were capable of it were nothing more or less than pirates. Yet that stern, terrible tendency thus illustrated is just one with that inscrutable law under which Nature herself has come to be what she is. It is what I call the selfward tendency, the desire to grasp and keep at the expense of other individualities, other societies than our own.

"But in history, and from those very earliest times down to our own, another tendency has shown itself at work, a counter tendency. The two have been so intertwined frequently—as I have indicated in showing where patriotism comes from—that it has been difficult to dissociate them, but they are quite distinct. Take, for instance, the magnificent devotion of Arnold von Winkelried on the field of Sempach. Switzerland has not existed as a political unit for many centuries, but during that time her roll of heroes has been large. In the formative hour of Swiss independence, when that tiny folk was struggling for liberty against the overweening power of Austria, it must have seemed a hopeless undertaking—this group of mountaineers against the chivalry of an empire. The great battle of Sempach was fought. The Swiss, armed with nothing but their battle-axes, hurled themselves in vain all day long against the serried ranks of Austrian mail-clad warriors, armed with

spears, through which the shepherdmen could make no way. They fell before them, but could not pass through them till Winkelried called to his countrymen, "Provide for my wife and children and I will make a way," and, rushing unarmed upon the spearmen of Austria, clasped in his embrace as many of them as he could and bore them to the earth. A dozen spears passed through his body, but through the gap his devotion had made his countrymen leaped to victory. That one act made possible, humanly speaking, the Swiss independence, which is an object-lesson for us to-day. Such acts as these form part of the cherished lore of nations. We feel they are the light-centres of the world. Something tells us that an act like that, the giving of a life for the sake of an ideal, a cause, a country, was a great thing. It represented the counter tendency to what was going on at that moment. In that very battle Austria was trying to grasp and hold, Switzerland was trying to get free and live her own life, and here was a man who, for the sake of his country's ideal, gave all that he had—his life. Will you tell me where to look for the focus and centre of that ideal? I know what your answer would be. It was at Calvary. The one thing which, consciously or subconsciously, men have recognized in Jesus that has given Him His supreme attraction for the world is this—He was absolutely disinterested. It is the disinterestedness of Jesus, His utter nobleness, His power of projecting Himself into the experience of others, and trying to lift humanity as a whole to His experience of God, that gave Him His power with

mankind. Jesus not only proclaimed, but lived, the counter tendency to the law of sin and death.

"Now, when we have brought the two together, you see the essential distinction between working for self and its deathward look, and working for all with its lifeward gaze. These two are antithetic, and must be in opposition until the latter destroys the former, and God is all in all, and love reigneth world without end.

"We are now able to see what sin is more plainly than before. Sin is the tendency to grasp and draw inward, and everything that feeds that tendency makes for death. Sin is the expansion of the individuality at the expense of the race; sin is acting on the belief that the soul can increase at another's cost, can gain by destroying what is another's good. Apply that explanation or definition of sin to what you know about life, and you will soon see when a man is facing the deathward road, and how differently he acts when he is choosing the lifeward road. There are men in this congregation who do not realize as they should that lifewardness is Godwardness; but so it is. The soul and the source of all things is God, and, consciously or unconsciously, all men are seeking God in that they are seeking self-expression, seeking life. The man, for instance, who is trying to become rich is a man who is seeking to express himself, seeking power, seeking life, seeking to thrust through the barriers that surround the soul. They are all doing it; the veriest materialist among you is seeking by his daily activities more abundant life. The young man here

who feels a burning ambition within his heart, a desire to exploit the world and make a name for himself, to occupy a high station, is not conscious of anything essentially unworthy. It all depends what he does with the impulse. What you are seeking, young man, is more abundant life, and that is equivalent to seeking God. Life *is* God. 'Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.' And when the tendency goes round and works havoc and ruin in the world, it still remains a quest for God, although a blundering one. It is a misuse of Divine energy. The man who got drunk last night and gratified his lower nature in that delirious hour would be surprised if you were to tell him, when you see the result, that he was really seeking God; but so it is. He wants life, and thinks he can get it this way. This is the reason why morbid excitement and the craving for amusement have such power in human lives to-day. Your *roué* in Piccadilly, who went out to destroy innocence, was seeking life while spreading death. It seems almost blasphemy to say it, but he was seeking God, and thinking—O woeful blunder!—that he would find Him by destroying something that God has made beautiful and fair. So with all acts of selfish gratification of which men are capable—they are the turning of the current of Divine energy the wrong way, and seeking self-gratification at the expense of something else that God has made. It is a failure to see that we only obtain life by giving life. When an engine goes off the line there is a smash, as a rule, and the greater the power

that was driving the engine, the worse is the wreck when it leaves the line. The lightning directed rightly becomes the luminant by which we look on each other's faces to-night. That same power might have brought havoc and destruction if it had not been harnessed in the service of man. And so with the power that God has given you; all desire for self-expression, all seeking of which you are conscious for larger and better and richer life, is God-given, but it may mean ruin and destruction unless you see that it is yours, not that you may draw inward, but that you may give outward—yours not to keep and hold, but yours wherewith to bless mankind. Sin is the tendency to keep for self that which was meant for the world. 'The wages of sin is death,' the death of soul. He who is guilty of sin is guilty of soul murder. 'All they that hate Me love death,' and he that spreads pain and ruin over other lives in the gratification of his own lower instincts is using something which is God-given—yea, which is essentially God's own life—in the wrong way. The only hope for him is to realize that no act of sin was ever yet worth while, that it does punish itself, must punish itself, for it shrivels and fetters the soul. No eleventh-hour repentance will ever save you, and no cowardly cry for relief will ever bring God's forgiveness into your soul until you have realized that sin and selfishness are one, and that what you have failed to give forth of love and service represents the measure of your soul poverty."

Even at the risk of prolixity and repetition, I have thought it right to insert these lengthy

extracts from sermons which have been animadverted upon. My readers will be able to judge of the fairness of the criticism which, by abstracting a few lines, strove to make it appear that my teaching denied the reality of sin. Here are the actual words, seen in their proper setting. If one were on the look-out for a good illustration of the sinfulness of sin, perhaps the controversial methods of the editor of the *British Weekly* might furnish it. This kind of criticism is on a par with the conduct of the gentleman who once startled an audience by declaring, "The Bible says there is no God." He was right, of course, if it be legitimate to suppress the former part of the passage, "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God."

It is time we had done with unreal talk about sin. Sin is the murder spirit in human experience. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Strong language; but I suppose the man who first used it must have known what he was talking about. Pomposity is sin, because it is egoism; self-complacency and contemptuousness are sin for the same reason. Cupidity is sin, whether in a burglar or a doctor of divinity. A bitter, grasping, cruel, unsympathetic spirit is sin, no matter who shows it. The scribe and the Pharisee are too much with us, and the religious ideal needs

to be rescued from their blighting grasp to-day as much as ever it did. Of all forms of sin, an arrogant, malignant, self-satisfied assumption of righteousness is the worst and the hardest to eradicate, as Jesus found to His cost. The terrible damning lie which is stifling religion to-day is the lie which crucified Jesus, the lie that spiritual pride can ever interpret God to a needy world. There is something grimly amusing in the suggestion that prosperous people should pay for sending gospel missions to the poor. If sin is selfishness, the poor had better missionize the rich. Imagine how it would be if things were reversed in this way, and a mission band of earnest slum dwellers took their stand in Belgravia, and began a house-to-house visitation, with all the theological terms carefully eliminated from the mission leaflets they thrust under the doors or handed to the powdered footmen. Instead of "Flee from the wrath to come, etc.," they might have, "Don't be selfish! it is hurting you and your neighbours, and making you unhappy. Don't pretend! it is poor business in the long run. Try to do as much as you can for other people, and you will know what God is." The attempt would be startling and unwelcome, but it would be far less impudent than the religious exhortations of the piously prosperous to the poor commonly are. For the truth is, that if sin is selfishness—and it is nothing else—the degraded habits of people at the lower end of the social scale are no more sinful than the ordinary

behaviour of most of their theological preceptors at the other. Most of the talk about sin is unreal; that is the trouble; so verily the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before us. In church, a man will profess himself to be a miserable sinner, but if we were to address him in the same way out of church, he would sue us for libel—if he thought we meant it. For Heaven's sake let us have done with the sham of it all, and face the truth. What mankind is suffering from is selfishness. Get rid of that, and there would be little left to trouble about.

It should now be plain why the doctrine of Atonement has been so closely associated with the doing away of sin; it is because, as we have seen, the root idea of Atonement is the assertion of the fundamental oneness of man with man and all with God. Sin is the divisive, separating thing in our relations with one another, and with God the source of all, so the assertion of our oneness involves getting rid of sin. If we ask how this is to be done, the answer is simple enough: the only way to get rid of selfishness is by the ministry of love. What is it that is slowly winning the world from its selfishness to-day, and lifting it gradually into the higher, purer atmosphere of universal love? There is but one thing that is doing it, and that is the spirit of self-sacrifice. Wherever you see that, you see the true Atonement at work. There can be no doubt about the final issue, for behind the spirit of love is infinity,

Atonement and sin.

whereas the spirit of selfishness is essentially finite. On the field of human history the death of Jesus is the focus and concentrated essence of this age-long atoning process, whereby selfishness is being overcome and the whole race lifted up to its home in God. Until Jesus came, no self-offering had been so consistent and so complete. No selfish desire could find lodgment in His pure soul. He showed men the ideal life by living it Himself—the life which was perfectly at one with God and man. In a selfish world that life was sure to end on a Calvary of some kind, but the very fact that it did so demonstrated the completeness of its victory over all considerations of self-interest. Selfishness lost the battle by seeming to gain it. God was behind the life of Jesus just because it was the life of perfect love, the life which was a perfect gift to the whole, therefore that life immediately arose in power in other lives and has gone on increasing its benevolent sway over human hearts ever since. This is the Atonement, and it is rightly associated with the cross of Jesus in the minds of men, for the cross is the sum and centre of it all.

The increasing Atonement.

But the Atonement to be effective has to be repeated on the altar of human hearts, and so it is, to a far greater extent than most people stop to think. The same spirit that was in Jesus and governed His whole career was the spirit of the true humanity, "The light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The spirit of Jesus was the

spirit of Christ, the ideal or Divine manhood as it exists eternally in God. But that ideal or Divine manhood, that Christ nature, is also potentially present in every human being. What needs to be done is to get it manifested or brought forth into conscious activity. The immediate effect of the life and death of Jesus upon His followers was to make them more or less like Him, and to fill them with a similar desire to get men to live the life of love which is the life of God. They felt themselves inspired by the same spirit, the Holy Spirit of truth and love, and exalted above all fear for their own safety and all desire to live for themselves alone. They loved their Lord so much that their lives became one with His in the work of saving the world. They could see no difference between serving their Master and serving mankind. This love force of theirs, this intense loyalty to Jesus was, and still is, the redeeming thing in the life of mankind. There is not, and never has been, any other Atonement. The Divine power that is breaking down selfishness, and transforming human desires in accordance with the eternal truth of things, is the spirit of self-sacrificing love. It is but a step from sinner to saviour. To cease to be a sinner is perforce to be a saviour. To escape from the dominion of selfishness is forthwith to become a power in the hand of God for the uplifting and ingathering of mankind to Himself; this is the Atonement.

Ask yourself whether this is not so. What

other force for good is there in the world to-day than the spirit which governed the whole life of Jesus, and rendered Him willing to brave the worst that evil could do in His desire to get men to realize the true life? There is no other. If you want to see the Atonement at work, go wherever love is ministering to human necessity, and you see the very same spirit which was in Jesus—the spirit which heals and saves. Dogma is doing nothing to save the world; the gospel of self-sacrifice is doing everything. Show me a Christ-like life, and I will show you a part of the Atonement of Christ. Show me a noble deed, and I will show you something worthy of Jesus. His self-offering and the love and devotion it awoke in human hearts are a perpetual sacrifice—a cumulative assertion that in the presence of need love can never do anything other than give itself until the need is supplied and love is all in all. There is even a possibility of substitution here. Vicarious suffering willingly accepted becomes irresistible in the long run as a means of lifting a transgressor out of the mire of selfishness. Many a noble wife has saved her husband by remaining at his side and patiently accepting the disabilities caused by his wrong-doing. It is even possible in such a case for the saviour to bear more than the sinner, and for the sinner to be relieved of some of the consequences of his mis-doing; he would have to suffer more if there were no loving helper to stand by him. But to speak of one as bearing

another's punishment is untrue; such a thing cannot be. All that love can do is to share to the uttermost in the painful consequences of sin, and by so doing break their power. What other atonement is needed than this? It requires no defence, and a child could understand it. Every one already believes in it, whether he stops to think about it or not. While I am writing these words a fierce storm is raging outside. This is the second day we have had of it, and there seems likely to be some loss of life on the dangerous rocks outside the bar which forms the entrance to the bay below. A visitor has just been telling me of a wilder storm in this same bay some years ago, and of which, he says, to-day's gale reminds him. On that previous occasion three ships were wrecked together within a few yards of this house. It must have been a dreadful, awe-inspiring scene. No boat could live in the surf, so every survivor had to be dragged ashore with ropes fastened to the cliffs, and hauled by willing hands. Hundreds of townspeople and fisher folk came pouring over from St. Ives and all the hamlets round about in order to take part in the work of rescue. According to my informant, the scene was enough to stir any heart, and even grown men were crying with excitement and compassion as some of the poor fellows in the rigging of the doomed vessels were washed away before they could be got ashore. The few who were actually snatched from the jaws of death found no lack

of willing helpers, as one by one they were passed insensible into the kind keeping of the many who stood waiting for an opportunity to be of service. No one grudged anything; every home and every bed would have been cheerfully placed at the disposal of the shipwrecked mariners if they had been wanted. Brave women, the wives and daughters of men who were risking their lives on the sea every day, willingly encouraged their husbands and sons in battling against the tempest in the endeavour to save other husbands and sons whom they had never seen or heard of until that hour of distress and need. And what a fight it was, to be sure! Never was a braver. Again and again these humble Cornish heroes dashed into the raging billows to grasp and guide the ropes that bore a flickering human life, and every time they returned with their helpless burden a cheer went up from the watchers that drowned for a moment the violence of the blast. No one thought of inquiring into the theology of saviours or survivors. No doubt there were some among the former who were oftener to be found at the public-house bar than at church, but no one could have distinguished them from the orthodox Christians, who fought the waves shoulder to shoulder beside them; they were there to save life, and in doing so their deeper manhood shone out with Divine splendour. But the most of the rescuers were good, sound, earnest Methodists, who perhaps believed, or thought they believed,

in the eternal damnation of the unregenerate. But what became of their doctrine in the face of an urgent human need, and the call for self-sacrifice to supply that need? It was utterly forgotten, and what they were doing at the moment was a spontaneous contradiction of it. There is both humour and pathos in the fact that these convinced believers in eternal fire tugged and tore at the ropes, and freely jeopardized their own lives in a magnificent endeavour to save perishing bodies from temporal water. There is the truth for you, the real Atonement. The heart creed is usually better than the head creed, and in great moments buries the latter out of sight. Here was the spirit of Christ, the true and eternal manhood, the spirit that seeks to save at its own cost. Here was the instinctive perception of the fundamental oneness of all life, and the recognition that the God-like thing is to seek to deliver life from the clutch of death.

All men instinctively believe in the Atonement.

This is the deepest and truest impulse of the human heart, as all men already know, if they would only trust their better nature to tell them what God wants from His children. Here is an explosion in a coal-mine, and forthwith every mother's son above ground volunteers to go down into the choke-damp to snatch his buried comrades from the sleep of death. A few months ago one such disaster took place in a Durham colliery. Most of my readers will remember that in the newspaper reports of the incidents that took place at

the pit mouth were the following: A father who was brought to the surface was asked whether he lost hope during the long hours of his imprisonment below without food or light. "No," was the reply; "for I knew my boy would be in the rescue party, and that nothing would turn him back until he found his father, dead or alive." The suffragan bishop of the diocese, along with a number of other clergymen and Nonconformist ministers, remained all night amid the scene of sorrow at the pit mouth, doing his best to comfort the mourners as their loved ones were brought up dead. As morning broke, he mounted a heap of cinders and, without making any attempt to conceal his emotion, spoke a few manly words of brotherly exhortation and Christian love to his deeply moved congregation of toilers and sufferers. One poor woman, with unconscious irony, exclaimed to the bystanders: "He doesn't seem like a bishop! He is just like one of ourselves." That servant of God has never preached the Atonement more effectually in all his life—the getting together of man and man, and man and God, through the spirit of self-sacrifice. He stands in the true apostolic succession, the succession of men like Saul of Tarsus, the erstwhile persecutor, who, under the inspiration of the love of Jesus, lived to say, "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not?"

Go into any home where the spirit of self-sacrificing love is trying to do anything to

supply a need or save a transgressor, and you see the Atonement. Follow that Salvation lassie to the slums, and listen to her as she tries to persuade a drunken husband and father to give up the soul-destroying habit which is such a curse to wife and child, and you see the Atonement. Go with J. Keir Hardie to the House of Commons, and listen to his pleading for justice to his order, and you see the Atonement. Hear the prayer of mother-love for the erring, wandering son, and you have the Atonement. See that grey-haired father patiently pleading with selfish, hot-headed youth, or yielding up his own hard-won possessions to pay the gambler's debts and save the family name, and you have the Atonement. Nothing can stir the human heart so much. All the great deeds of history derive their inspiration from it; all the little heroisms of our common everyday life are the declaration of it. There is not a single one of all our thoughts and activities but has some relation to it. We are either living for ourselves individually and separately, or we are living for the whole. If the former, we are the servants of sin; if the latter, our lives are already part of the Atonement.

Jesus and the Atonement.

It is easy to see how much the world owes to Jesus in this regard. I cannot tell what the world might have been if there had never been a Jesus, but certain it is that the sacrificial life and death of Jesus have meant the inpouring of a spirit into human affairs such as had never been known in the

same degree before. Here for the first time men saw a perfect manifestation of the life that is life indeed, the life that pleased not itself, the life that entered into and shared human disabilities as though they were its very own, the life that in the presence of selfishness must inevitably become sacrifice, the life of Atonement; in a sinful world that life had to come to a Calvary, but, in so doing, in refusing to shield and save itself, it became the greatest moral power and the greatest revelation of God that the world has ever known. What we succeed in doing some of the time Jesus did all the time; when all men are able to do it all the time the Atonement will have become complete, and love Divine shall be all in all. "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!" cried Julian the apostate; and Christian faith can reverently add—

> "Jesus is worthy to receive
> Honour and power Divine;
> And blessings more than we can give
> Be, Lord, for ever Thine."

Faith in Jesus is faith in the Atonement and faith in our own Christhood. It means the uprising of the true life, the eternal life, within our own souls. Until His spirit becomes our spirit His Atonement has done nothing for us, and, when it does, we, like Him, become saviours of the race. It must be so, for the spirit of love is the same both in God and man; in the presence of need, no matter what the need may be, that spirit must continue to give itself without stint until the

need is supplied, and all that would tend to separate between the individual soul and the eternally perfect whole is done away.

But then, some one will say, what has the death of Jesus effected in the unseen so as to make it possible for God to forgive us? Nothing whatever, and nothing was ever needed. God is not a fiend, but a Father, the source and sustenance of our being and the goal of all our aspirations. Why should we require to be saved from Him?

Divine satisfaction in Atonement.

But in what sense is the death of Jesus a satisfaction to the Father? In no sense at all, except that the sacrifice of Jesus is the highest expression of the innermost of God that has ever been made. If it affords an artist satisfaction to express himself in a beautiful picture, or a great thinker to express his noble thought in a book, surely the highest satisfaction that God can know must be His self-expression in the self-sacrifice of His children. At its best, the intensest joy that can be known is the joy of giving one's self for the good of the whole. In everything grand and good in human thought and achievement, God is doing just this. It is the satisfaction he receives from the Atonement, and the only one.

CHAPTER XI

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Atonement and New Testament language.

It will have been observed that in my examination of the subject of the Atonement, I have said almost nothing about the New Testament evidence for the doctrine. This, I admit, is an entire departure from the method usually followed by those who write upon it, and may be thought by some to vitiate my whole argument. But the omission is of set purpose, for I am convinced that New Testament language about the Atonement, especially the language of St. Paul, has been, and still is, the prolific source of most of the mischievous misinterpretations of it which exist in the religious mind. To an extent this is the same with the Old Testament, but to a far less degree, for the language of the Old Testament is only liable to misapprehension when interpreted by the New. In a previous chapter I have endeavoured to show the imperishable truths which underlie Old Testament symbolism in regard to the Atonement, and I trust I have shown that these truths are as fresh and indispensable to-day, and play as great a part in human affairs as they

ever did. But before I proceed to say anything about the New Testament symbolism which has been largely derived from the Old, let us consider the question of the authority of Scripture as a whole.

There is always a tendency in the ordinary mind to rely upon some form of external authority in religious as in other matters. With one man it is the authority of an infallible Church; with another the authority of an infallible book; with another the authority of some infallible statement of belief which ought to hold good for all time, but never does. At the best external authority is only a crutch, and at the worst it may become a rigid fetter upon the expanding soul. The true seat of authority is within, not without, the human soul. We are so constituted as to be able to recognize, little by little, the truth of God as it comes to us. It may come from any one of a thousand different quarters, but to be recognized and felt as truth it must awaken an echo within the individual soul. If it does not awaken such a response it is of non-effect so far as the growth of the soul is concerned. What is true in this book will not be received as true by the readers merely because I say it, but because they feel it to be true and cannot get away from it. Why should we be afraid of trusting the human soul to recognize and respond to its own truth? All truth is one, and all earnest truth-seekers are converging upon

Tendency to bow to external authority.

one goal. It is the Divine self within every one of us which enables us to discern the truth best fitted to our needs, and this Divine self is, as has already been pointed out, fundamentally one with the source of all truth, which is God.

If men could only come to see this more clearly, and to trust their own Divine nature to enable them to follow and express the truth as well as to receive it, they would not suffer themselves to be hampered by formal and literal statements of belief, whether in the Church, the Bible, or anywhere else. But this is what they seldom do. Your devout Anglican or Roman Catholic will tell you that the Church teaches this or the Church teaches that, as though that fact ever permanently settled anything. One cannot really begin to appreciate the value of united continuous Church testimony until one is able to stand apart from it, so to speak, and ask whether it rings true to the reason and the moral sense. Suppose the Christian Church enjoined or permitted rape and murder, would the devout Catholic believe and obey? "But it is inconceivable that the Church could ever do that," he might answer. Yes; but suppose it did, would he obey? If not, why not? He would not obey because he would know quite well that the higher law within his heart would forbid and render impossible any such obedience. That is all the answer I want. Why should we not apply it all the way round? The real test of

truth is to be found in the response it awakens within the soul.

Now, one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of many devout and intelligent minds to-day is that of the supposed binding authority of the letter of Scripture. When a good man hears some inspiring or common-sense statement of truth—for instance, that of universal salvation—he often replies in some such way as the following: "Yes, I know it seems very plausible, and my heart desires to believe it; but then, you know, it says in the Scripture, 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. I cannot get behind that.'" He will go on stringing together passage after passage, often without the slightest suspicion that the original meaning had nothing whatever to do with the subject under discussion: as, for example, that well-known sentence in Ezekiel, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Whatever Ezekiel originally meant by that saying—and it is well worth examination—he was not thinking of a modern revival meeting. The plain, average, level-headed business man of religious temperament will sometimes bother himself in this way until he thinks of giving up religion altogether. The letter of Scripture often seems to say one thing and the Christ-like human heart another. Take, as one example out of many, that pungent passage in Psalm cxxxvii.: "Happy shall he be that

The supposed authority of the letter a great hindrance to truth.

taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." That passage does not breathe the spirit of Jesus, nor is it true to the best in human nature; no follower of Jesus wants to see a little one dashed against a stone. But even to do justice to a passage of this kind we have to get into intellectual and moral sympathy with the man who wrote it. It was written by one of the poor Jewish prisoners carried away captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar six centuries or more before Jesus was born. Try and picture the scene. Across eight hundred miles of desert that melancholy procession winds its way, leaving the highland home behind and going into slavery in the cruel city of the plain. One by one the weakest fall and die; and where a baby is left without a mother, or the mother cannot walk with the weight of the helpless child, the cruel Babylonian ruffians riding at the side will snatch it from the anguished bosom and dash its brains out against the rocks. Would we be likely to forget that if we had ever formed part of such a procession of prisoners of war? Hence when Psalm cxxxvii. came to be written by some poor suffering father who had lost, maybe, both wife and child, he gave vent to his feelings in one of the most plaintive patriotic songs ever sung—

> "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they

> that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. . . . O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."

One can feel deep sympathy with this unknown poet and his suffering people without adopting the absurd view that this passage represents God's word to our souls. It is a cry of suffering mingled with a desire for vengeance, and that is all. But when a modern preacher dramatically declares that he takes his stand and bases his gospel on the infallible book, he is either a fool or—a rhetorician.

Belief in the infallible book impossible.

There are many good people who maintain that they believe the Bible from cover to cover; they seem to think that this is something to be proud of. But they credit themselves with an impossible feat; no one can believe contradictions, in the sense of accepting them, whether intellectual or moral. The very same people who will read with unction the most sanguinary exhortations from Scripture are usually people who themselves would not hurt a fly. The Bible is not like a parliamentary blue book, an exact and literal statement of facts; it

represents, for the most part, what earnest men belonging to a particular nationality in a bygone age thought about life in relation to God. Many good people talk as though the Bible were written by the finger of God Himself, and let down from heaven; on the other hand, there are those who think that when they have shown the inconsistencies of Scripture they have destroyed its value. But they are both mistaken. The Bible is not one book, but a collection of books, a slow growth extending over centuries. It has come to be reverenced, not because of any supernormal attestations of its authority, but because we have found it helps us more than any other book. The fact that the best part of it was written by good and serious men, men who were living for the highest they were able to see, does not necessarily give binding authority to the opinions of these men. I question whether we should ever have heard of the Old Testament if it had not been for Jesus; and the New is only a statement of what some good men thought about Jesus and His gospel at the beginning of Christian history. Jesus knew and loved the Old Testament Scriptures, but whenever He found a statement therein that jarred upon His moral sense, He rejected it in the name of the higher truth declared by the Spirit of Truth within His own soul. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry

with his brother without a cause"—and even "without a cause" seems to have been interpolated in later days—"shall be in danger of the judgment." "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all, neither by the heavens, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool. Let your communication be Yea, yea, nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thine neighbour and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Jesus knew what He was doing. In all these instances He was quoting from the Old Testament, and deliberately superseding in the name of truth certain prescriptions of the very law which He said He had come to fulfil. Every one was taken by surprise at His daring to do this. Matthew (vii. 28, 29) says: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that people were astonished at His teaching: for He taught them as one having (in Himself) authority, and not as the scribes." No doubt some people would say to-day that this authority came from His Godhead. But the people on the hillsides of Galilee knew nothing about the Godhead of Jesus. To them He was a heaven-sent teacher, a great and inspiring

master, whose words carried weight. His authority, therefore, must have been self-evident, in contradiction to that of the scribes, who always began their discourses by saying, "It is written." They never seem to have thought of appealing to anything else than the authority of the letter. But we see that Jesus, notwithstanding His reverence for the Scripture, handled it with perfect freedom. His authority was that of the Spirit of God speaking within His own soul, the only authority that has ever mattered in the history of religious thought. He did not deny the authority of Scripture, but He claimed to be able to see when it rang true to His own inner experience and when it did not.

The true seat of authority.

If we could grasp this principle clearly and strongly, it would give us a new and higher sense of freedom and of confidence in the Word of God as declared in the Bible and revealed in human hearts. God has never stopped speaking to men. He speaks through us collectively and individually. "The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thine heart, that thou mayest do it." If we are only in earnest to listen for the Divine voice and to trust it when we hear it, we shall not listen in vain. To realize that God is speaking to us just as He spoke to earnest souls in the days of old, will send us to the sacred Scriptures with an even greater appreciation and reverence for the men of whose experience they are the expression. But they will no longer bind us;

they can only help and encourage us. We shall feel that these men of faith of an earlier day and a different race were our brothers after all, men who lived a life much like our own, and who were trying to understand God as we are trying to understand Him. The Bible is not infallible for the simple reason that the human nature, even of wise and great men, is not infallible. It helps us because these men were struggling with the same problems as ourselves, and therefore what they have to say about them is valuable. But the best of them had their limitations and shortcomings. They did not know all the truth that was to be known, but they kept their faces to the light. If we allow ourselves to be fettered by their actual words, we shall be in danger of losing sympathy with them in the spirit which animated those words. We are writing a Bible with our own lives to-day, a Bible which may never be read in its fulness by human eyes, but every letter of which is known and read in heaven. Every noble life is a word of God to the world; every brave, unselfish deed is a ray of eternal truth. Our characters ought to become living epistles, known and read of all men, while we strive to express the best that God has given us to see; for the same eternal Spirit of Truth, the Spirit who has been the teacher of all the Elijahs, Isaiahs, and Pauls of history, is with us to-day as He was with them.

But, some one will remonstrate, What, then, are we to believe? For by speaking in this way

you erect as many standards of truth as there are individuals. What the ordinary man wants is to be told just what to believe, so that he can settle down and be at rest. It is small comfort to tell him that every Scripture statement may be more or less fallible, and that he must trust to his own perception, or perhaps to his own fancies, as to what is true. I know all that kind of argument. It is as old as, or older than, Christianity itself. It was used in all sincerity against Jesus by some earnest people of His time. It was used again at the Reformation. It is still used by sacerdotal controversialists, and looks very plausible on the face of it. A devout and earnest Roman Catholic will tell you that in Protestantism there are a thousand different creeds, all claiming to be authoritative, and that the principle of private judgment can only lead to intellectual and moral chaos. Your Protestant literalist will tell you that the Romanist criticism has a good deal in it, and that you must have a final standard of authority, either the infallible Church, the infallible book, or the infallible Confession of Faith. But, notwithstanding the dogmatists, the supposed infallible Confession of Faith is almost universally discredited, and common honesty is compelling Protestants to abandon the theory of an infallible book. The supposed infallible Church has by no means been invariably self-consistent. Besides, the important point is this: No man really believes or can believe a thing until it becomes, so to speak,

The unity of truth.

part of himself. Holding propositions is not necessarily believing them, no matter how tenaciously they may be adhered to. But all truth is really one and the same. I may be unable to take exactly my neighbour's point of view about some aspects of it, but if we are both in earnest, and faithful to what we have seen, we shall arrive in the end, as I have said, at the same goal. Religious thinkers and teachers are never really so far apart as seems to be the case. It is in the expression of the truth that they differ, not in the truth itself. Language is never more than an approximately convenient expression of the reality it is meant to declare. The man of the future will realize this better than the man of the present or the past. He will replace all external authority by the principle of spiritual autonomy. He will no longer be afraid of trusting the human spirit to recognize and respond to truth, from whatsoever source it may come, for he will know that that spirit is one with the universal Spirit of all Truth, and needs not to look beyond itself for anything stronger or more Divine. He will know that the Spirit of Truth in himself is the Spirit of Truth in all men, and that therefore in the end all men must know, and be, and do the Truth.

Now let us apply this principle to the New Testament writings about the redeeming work of Jesus. The same principle, of course, would apply to anything that the New Testament has to say about the gospel of Jesus, but perhaps

the failure to recognize it has done more mischief in connection with the doctrine of Atonement than in anything else. At present Paul's opinion on this great subject is by many people supposed to be decisive. Paul says this, and Paul says that, and when Paul has spoken there is no more to be said. But why should it be so? Paul's opinion is simply Paul's opinion, and not necessarily a complete and adequate statement of truth. It is entitled to be considered weighty because it is the utterance of a great man, and a great seer of truth, as well as being the earliest writing on the subject which we possess. Any man of the moral and intellectual eminence of Paul is entitled to reverence when he speaks, whether his views are in the Bible or not. It is one of the ironies of history that the words of this Paul who strove so hard against literalism and legalism in his day have since come to be regarded as a sort of fixed and final authority for Christian thought. He would be the first to denounce it. To him the Spirit of Christ, operating within the individual soul, was the true guide in matters of faith. He even made a point of the fact that in thinking out the truth about Jesus and His gospel he had "conferred not with flesh and blood."

The New Testament and the Atonement.

Inconsistency of New Testament writers with one another.

Again, it is somehow taken for granted that Paul and all the other New Testament writers agree together in their theology of the Atonement. That is

quite a mistake, and the curious thing is that people should have been so slow in finding it out. It may be instructive to some to give a brief survey of the main points in Paul's theory of the Atonement, and compare them with some of the others.

It would simplify our acquaintance with Paul's mode of reasoning if we could recognize that the truth of Atonement which he has to declare, and which he associates so closely with the life and death of Jesus, is in principle precisely the same as that which the writers of the Old Testament had in mind. What that was we have already seen. It was the assertion of the fundamental oneness of God and man, and the means to it was the principle of self-sacrifice. This is what Paul set himself to proclaim to the world, and to him the whole process centred in Jesus, just as it does for Christian experience. But to his presentation of the subject, Paul almost of necessity had to bring the whole apparatus of his rabbinical training. This it was which supplied him with most of his figures, symbols, and illustrations; but his gospel was no more dependent upon these than—as I trust I have shown in a previous chapter—the ancient spiritual truth of Atonement depended upon Semitic ritual sacrifices. Paul's thought-forms were supplied by the Old Testament and his Pharisaic education, just as the forms in which we ordinarily express our thoughts to-day belong

The fundamental principle of the Atonement always the same.

to the mental atmosphere of our time. Most of the allusions in a *Times* leading article, for example, would be lost upon an English reader five hundred years hence, unless they were carefully explained. To me one of the most remarkable things about Jesus is the fact that He was able to escape so completely the mental environment of the time in which, and the people among whom, He lived His earthly life. How He managed to deliver His peerless teaching while making so little allusion to current Jewish modes of thought and worship is a mystery, and marks His greatness as perhaps nothing else does. It was utterly different with Paul; he spoke the language of his time, and never tried to do anything else. When, therefore, we want to get at what he meant about the death of Jesus, we have first of all to get behind the symbolism by which he illustrates it, and even when we have done this, we have to make allowance for some limiting Pharisaic conceptions about justice and the punishment of sin. Every now and then he breaks through these and rises into a rarer, purer region, without troubling about consistency. Paul never dreamed that he was writing theological treatises which would be numbered off into chapters and verses, and lectured upon in class-rooms, or perhaps he would have been more careful about being exact. How many of us could afford to have our letters, written at different times and to different readers, analyzed and dissected and taken as a full and permanent statement of our

thought upon any particular subject or group of subjects?

The first important thing to be noted in Paul's thought about sin and salvation is his view that there was a vital connection between the death of the Messiah and God's forgiveness of sins. But we should be mightily mistaken if we were to understand this view to be the same as that of a modern evangelical who talks about the "fountain filled with blood," for it was quite different. The modern evangelical, of so-called orthodox opinions, believes that Jesus died to save all men from hell; but this was not what Paul was thinking about at all. According to Paul, the wages of sin were actually and literally physical death. But for sin there would have been no death, and to break the power of sin would also be to break the power of death. But in this Paul was wrong, in company with a good many of his contemporaries; and there is no reason why we should not frankly say so, for, as we shall presently see, the great apostle did not confine himself to the literal statement of this view, but gave it also a mystical form, in which it becomes indisputably true. In his thought, the Messiah of Jewish national expectation was the head and representative of the nation in relation to God. For ages men had been dying because of sin—"in Adam all die;" and so when the Sinless One came into human conditions and in the likeness of sinful flesh, He also had to pass through

Paul's view of the death of the Saviour and the forgiveness of sins.

death. But there was a difference between His death and all other deaths, in that, being sinless, death could not hold Him, and so He rose again from the tomb triumphant over it. His triumph, then, becomes potentially the triumph of humanity—"in Christ shall all be made alive"—if only we unite ourselves to Him by faith. God will remit the death penalty to all who are "in Christ" and "justified by faith;" that is, we shall all rise from the dead as He rose. Apparently Paul's belief was that no one would ever have died but for the sin of Adam—a taint which has affected all Adam's descendants.

The next thing to be noticed is the juridical nature of Paul's conception of the relationship of man and God. God is a Lawgiver and man a transgressor, a rebel against His sovereignty. In accordance with God's law of righteousness, sin is punishable by the death of the whole race. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." But when the eternal Son of God, the head and representative of the race, submits to this penalty, and in so doing acknowledges the righteousness of God, justice is satisfied. "If one died for all, therefore all died." Those who claim by faith the benefits of Messiah's submission to death on behalf of the race are at peace with God. Henceforth they are not to live to themselves, but "unto Him who died for them and rose again."

Any one who reads Paul's words without

dogmatic prejudice will see that this is *not* the present-day orthodox doctrine of Atonement. It takes for granted certain ideas which were current among the Jews of Paul's day, but which have since sunk into the background of Christian thought or been abandoned altogether. Paul's use of them in the framing of his theology is ingenious, but not convincing, and was not essential to his gospel; in fact, the juridical and the ethical elements in Paul's teaching stand in irreconcilable contrast. His theology is saved by his mysticism, for no sooner has he enunciated these unbelievable propositions about the death-penalty of sin, the judicial sovereignty of God, justification by faith, the imputed merits of the Redeemer, and such-like, than he proceeds to use them as symbols to illustrate a subjective change in the sinner, and a mystical union between the soul and Christ. He does this so beautifully that the reader can hardly discern where Paul quits the region of literalism and takes us into that of mysticism. Hence he talks about dying with Christ, being crucified with Christ, dying to sin, and so on, evidently meaning that the whole redeeming process has to take place *within* the soul of the sinner who seeks God. Even the conception of the resurrection ceases to be literal, and becomes the uprising of the Divine man within the human soul by faith in the risen Lord. "If any man be in Christ there is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." "There is therefore

now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." We see from these expressions that in practice Paul transfers the whole drama of redemption from without to within the individual soul. What a pity it is that his interpreters in Christian history have so seldom thought of doing the same!

The Epistle to the Hebrews belongs to quite a different category from the writings of St. Paul. The dominant thought in this Epistle is that of salvation by sacrifice—a perfectly true and spiritual idea, as we have already seen. The writer, like Paul, employs Old Testament symbolism, but in quite a different way. Probably this is due to the fact that he was an Alexandrian Jew, whose thinking was shaped under the influence of Philo, whereas that of Paul was governed by the rabbinical schools of Palestinian Judaism. At this time Alexandria was the greatest intellectual centre in the world, a meeting-place for Greek thought and Hebrew religion as represented by Philo. The influence of Alexandria is plainly to be seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, possibly, was written by the learned, courtly Apollos. Like Paul, the writer thinks of salvation as getting right with God and living a holy life; but he omits all reference to a judicial penalty, or the necessity for escaping annihilation by faith in the substitutionary work of a sinless Redeemer. In his view Christ is from first to last the priestly

The Hebrews theory.

representative of the race, making a sacrifice to God after the Old Testament fashion, but in a more perfect way. He regards the Old Testament sacrificial offerings as being but the types and shadows of the one perfect and eternal offering which humanity through Christ is making to God. Most of my readers will at once admit that this is not fanciful, although the language in which it is expressed is so different from our own; it is quite faithful to the spiritual meaning of Old Testament sacrifice. When, therefore, this writer refers to the offering of the blood of Christ, he is thinking not only of Calvary, but of all that Calvary symbolizes—the perfect spiritual offering of mankind to God, the sacramental realization of our oneness with Him. This view is not worked out with the moral intensity which characterizes Paul's, but it is unassailably true once we get the writer's point of view. As a theory it is quite different from Paul's, unless we are content to shed Paul's literalism, get rid of all thought of an angry God and a physical death-penalty for sin, and betake ourselves instead to the inner spiritual region, where self-sacrifice is realized to be the means of saving not only the individual but the whole race by uniting it to the source of all being.

There is a certain similarity between the view of Atonement set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews and that contained in the Johannine writings. It is easy to understand why this is so when we recognize that both are dominated

by Alexandrian modes of thinking. These Johannine writings—the Fourth Gospel, the three Epistles ascribed to St. John, and the Book of Revelation—are all that have come down to us of what was at one time, no doubt, a considerable literature. How much the Apostle John had to do with it cannot be determined with any certainty, but it is clear enough that these writings are not all from one hand, and that they are much later than the work of St. Paul. The all-important conception in the Johannine writings is that salvation is secured by the union of the individual soul with the eternal Christ, or Logos, or Divine Man of pre-Christian thought and experience. Here, again, we have a perfectly true and necessary idea, an idea implied in all spiritual experience worthy of the name, but as the root factor in a presentation of the doctrine of Atonement it differs widely from Paul's way of putting things. When the Johannine writers speak of the blood of Christ they mean the out-poured, forth-given life of the eternal Son of God, the ideal humanity, perfectly and centrally expressed in Jesus of Nazareth. There is not from beginning to end a hint or a suggestion in these writings that a sinless being was tortured in order to appease the wrath of God against guilty ones, or that the penalty of sin in a world to come will be remitted to a penitent sinner in consideration of his faith in such an arrangement.

The Johannine theory.

This is by no means an exhaustive examination of New Testament teaching on the subject of Atonement, but it should be sufficient to show two things: First, that the theories of the New Testament writers concerning the redeeming works of Christ are not, taken literally, mutually consistent; secondly, the truth implied in all the theories is precisely the truth of Atonement which we have already seen to be implied in all religion. The great thing which impressed the primitive Christian consciousness in regard to the life and death of Jesus, was that this life and death were the most complete and consistent self-offering of the individual to the whole that had ever been made. In this self-offering was the one perfect manifestation of the eternal Christ, the humanity which reveals the innermost of God, the humanity which is love. To partake of the benefits of that Atonement we have to unite ourselves to it; that is, to employ the mystical language of St. Paul, we have to die to self with Christ, and rise with Him into the experience of larger, fuller life, the life eternal. It is just the same truth under every one of these different theories; but if we persist in regarding them literally, we shall miss it, for by no kind of ingenuity can we square the theory of Paul with that of the other writers; the way of putting it is different. But once we see what the essential truth of Atonement is, we are no longer bound by the intellectual symbolism of Paul or Hebrews or any other

Underlying unity.

authority; we can get beneath the symbol to the thing symbolized. The Pauline principle of dying with Christ, the Hebrews idea of the eternal sacrifice manifested in time, the Johannine thought about the out-poured life of the eternal Christ are all one and the same. Jesus did nothing for us which we are not also called upon to do for ourselves and one another in our degree. Faith in His atoning work means death to self that we may live to God; as self-hood perishes on its Calvary, the Christ, the True Man, the Divine reality in whom we are one with all men, rises in power in our hearts, and unites us to the source of all goodness and joy. Institutional, forensic, external, the Atonement never has been and never will be. But vicarious suffering, willingly accepted, is the great redeeming force by which the world is gradually being won to its true life in God, for vicarious suffering is the expression of the law that in a finite world the service of the whole involves pain, although it is also the deepest joy that the human heart can know. The sacrifice of Jesus is the central and ideal expression of this principle on the field of time, but it only possesses meaning and value as it is repeated in our lives; the Christ has to be offered perpetually on the altar of human hearts. There is no justification except by becoming just, and no imputed righteousness which means availing ourselves of merits that are not ours. We are "justified by faith," indeed, but only in the sense that no man can

become good without believing in goodness, and no man can really believe in the Christ revealed in Jesus without gradually becoming like Him. Here are Atonement, Justification, Sanctification, and all else that is needed to unite mankind to the life eternal, which is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

It can hardly be necessary to point out that there is therefore no direct reference in the Old Testament to the atoning work of Jesus. All the beautiful passages with which we are so familiar, and which have become the language of devotion in reference to such sacred seasons as Christmas Day and Good Friday, can only be associated with Jesus in an ideal sense. The noble fifty-third of Isaiah, for example, and all similar passages about the prophetic conception of the suffering servant of God have, literally understood, nothing whatever to do with Jesus. But the striking thing about such passages is that the men who wrote them were able to realize and express the very essence of the spiritual Atonement—the giving of the individual for the race. Take the pathetic and inspiring description, "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our

No Old Testament prophecy of Atonement of Jesus.

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." This is perhaps the grandest presentation of the atoning life, the Christ-man, that exists in literature. The ideal fulfilment of it was Jesus, as primitive Christianity quickly saw; but had the original writer no specific example in mind belonging to his own day when he wrote? To be sure he had. The case of Jeremiah would furnish it, if no other. This brave and faithful advocate of the moral ideal, after standing alone in his resistance to the materializing tendencies of his time, was scorned and hated by his fellow-countrymen, flung into prison, maltreated, and probably murdered in the end. He shared in the suffering of the Jews under Nebuchadnezzar, a calamity against which he had warned them in vain. "Despised and rejected of men" he died; but in later days his name came to be reverenced as perhaps none had ever been before. For centuries afterwards he was referred to by the returned exiles as *the* prophet, in contradistinction to all other prophets. He had lived the atoning life and died a sacrificial death. It was not wonderful that the author of the fifty-third of Isaiah should have such a noble example in mind when he penned his deathless words; but these words were meant to have an impersonal meaning too. They stand as a description of the ideal manhood, the true servant of God, the saviour of the race in any and every

generation. This kind of manhood, just because it is the true manhood, the eternal or Divine manhood, must inevitably suffer in a selfish world. But these sufferings are never in vain; they are the Calvary from which the eternal Christ rises in redeeming might over the power of sin and death. Let any man ask himself what it is that is saving the world to-day, and gradually but surely lifting it out of the mire of ignorance and wickedness, and he cannot find a better answer than the fifty-third of Isaiah. It tells of Jesus; but it tells also of all the sons of God who, in the spirit of Jesus, have ever given their lives in the service of love.

When we go to the Bible in this common-sense way, entering with understanding and sympathy into the thoughts and aspirations of the men who wrote it, it becomes a living book, and a real help in the endeavour to live our lives in union with Jesus Christ. But to regard it as a sort of official document written by the finger of God, of equal authority in every part, and containing a full and complete statement of the propositions we must accept in order to make sure of salvation, is hampering and belittling to the soul. God inspires men, not books, and He will go on inspiring men to the end of time, whether they write books or not. I do not know anything which is such a serious hindrance and stumbling-block to spiritual religion to-day as this supposed authority of the letter of Scripture. If only the average Protestant could emancipate

himself from this intellectual bondage, the gain to truth would be immeasurable. I do not suppose there is a single man who reads these words who would make light of the religious opinions of a pious mother; but would he allow them to fetter him in the exercise of his own mature judgment? But surely your own mother stands as near to you as men who wrote centuries before she was born. If God spoke to the hearts of men centuries ago, He can and does speak to them now. If He spoke to Isaiah, He can and does speak to you. If your mother's way of stating truth is not necessarily yours, no more is Paul's. The deeper unity of the spirit forbids this blind obedience to the letter. Therefore, knowing quite well what use hostile reviewers will make of this sentence, I close by adding: never mind what the Bible says about this or that if you are in search for truth, but trust the voice of God within you. The Bible will help you in your quest, just as any good man might be able to help you; but you must judge, test, and weigh the various statements it contains, just as you would judge, test, and weigh the opinions of the best friend you ever had. Nothing can make up for this quiet and assured confidence in the Spirit of Truth within your own soul. If God is not there, you will not find Him in the Bible or anywhere else.

CHAPTER XII

SALVATION, JUDGMENT, AND THE LIFE TO COME

We come now to the consideration of a group of subjects which are usually treated in quite separate categories. I mean the punishment of sin, the nature and scope of Salvation, Resurrection, and Ascension, Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. The reason why I feel that these subjects ought not to be treated in separate categories is because they are all descriptions of states of the soul, and imply each other; they are inward, not outward experiences. This statement will, I trust, become clearer as we proceed.

The inwardness of salvation and judgment.

So far we have examined pretty thoroughly the nature of sin and its effects in the world, but have said very little as to its penal consequences, and yet the consideration of these consequences has been the determining factor in most of the theories of Atonement, ancient or modern, which have occupied the field of human thought. It is true, as I have said, that the idea of Atonement is not necessarily associated with that of sin, and actually precedes it both historically and psychologically; but it cannot be gainsaid that in

Christian thought the desirability of finding some means of escaping or minimizing the punishment of sin has tended to overshadow everything else in popular presentations of the Atonement. But what is the punishment of sin, and who administers it? What is the judgment, and when does it take effect? How does salvation stand related to punishment and judgment? What has death to do with the matter? What are we to understand by heaven and hell, and what is the bearing of either upon salvation and judgment? Every one knows how popular evangelical theology would answer these questions. Sin, we are told, will be punished in a future life by the committal of the impenitent soul to everlasting torment. Salvation is primarily a means of escaping this, and secondarily being conformed gradually to the moral likeness of the Saviour. Judgment is a grand assize, which will take place when the material world comes to an end; Jesus Christ will be the Judge, and will apportion everlasting weal or woe according as the soul has claimed the benefit of His redeeming work in time to profit by it. Death is the dividing line beyond which the destiny is fixed eternally, whether we die old or young. Heaven is the place into which the redeemed enter—whether after death or after judgment has never been clearly settled—there to praise God eternally in perfect happiness; hell is the place of never-ending torment to which unbelievers are to be consigned.

Now, it does not require a very profound intelligence to see that popular theology is a mass of contradictions in regard to these things. By eternal the ordinary Christian usually means everlasting; why should punishment be everlasting? The worst sin that was ever sinned does not deserve everlasting punishment, and I have never yet met the Christian who would really be willing to see a fellow-creature undergo it. There is no understandable sense in which justice could demand such a terrible sentence, even if it involved no more than everlasting unhappiness; how much more unthinkable it becomes if the punishment is to be everlasting, fiendish torment! If salvation is first and foremost deliverance from this punishment, how is it that it does not take effect immediately? Justice would suggest that it ought to do so, for some sinners live a merry life until the eleventh hour, and then give God "the last snuff of the candle," as Father Taylor put it; whereas others repent early, but never manage, all through a long life, to escape the suffering caused by their own deeds in youth. In some cases, at any rate, on this side of the grave, salvation does not involve the least remission of penalty, while in others, apparently, no penalty will ever be endured either on this side of death or on the other. The poor drunkard who repents does not find that repentance gives him back his wrecked constitution; but the selfish, grasping, cruel-hearted wrecker of homes and lives may

just be in time with his trust in the "finished work," and go right home to glory, while his victims struggle and suffer on amid the conditions he has made for them on earth. Curious justice this!

There is no need to labour the point; popular evangelical views of the punishment of sin are incredible, when looked at in a common-sense way. But they are even more chaotic on the subject of death and whatever follows death. It does not seem to be generally recognized that Christian thought has never been really clear concerning the Resurrection, especially in relation to future judgment. One view has been that the deceased saint lies sleeping in the grave until the archangel's trump shall sound, and bid all mankind awake for the great assize. Any one who reads the New Testament without prejudice will see that this was Paul's earlier view, although later on he changed it for another. There is a good deal of our current everyday religious phraseology which presumes it still—

Christian thought never quite consistent about death and after.

> "Father, in Thy gracious keeping,
> Leave we now Thy servant sleeping."

But alongside this view, another, which is a complete contradiction of it, has come down to us, namely, that immediately after death the soul goes straight to heaven or hell, as the case may be, without waiting for the archangel's trump and the grand assize. On the whole, this is the

dominant theory of the situation in Protestant circles, and is much less reasonable than the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, however much the latter may have been abused. But under this Protestant view, what is the exact significance of the Judgment Day and the physical Resurrection? One would think they might be accounted superfluous. What is the good of tormenting a soul in hell for ages, and then whirling it back to the body in order to rise again and receive a solemn public condemnation? Better leave it in the Inferno and save trouble, especially as the solemn trial is meaningless, seeing that a part of the sentence has already been undergone, and that there is no hope that any portion of it will ever be remitted. Truly, the tender mercies with which theologians have credited the Almighty are cruel indeed!

It is difficult to speak with patience of the solemn non-committal way in which many present-day theological writers discuss everlasting punishment. Many of them have an "open mind" on the subject, whatever that may be, and warn the rest of us not to dogmatize on the great mystery. It does not seem to occur to them that the Christian fundamental of the love of God renders the dogma of everlasting punishment impossible, for it implies that God will do the most for the being that needs the most, and surely that must be the most unhappy sinner. Others speak of a "larger hope," a second opportunity for accepting Divine grace, and so on. But these theories do not

meet the case at all. While sin remains in the universe, God is defeated; everlasting punishment involves His everlasting failure. How often we hear preachers speaking about the obdurate human will, which to all eternity may go on resisting good. There are not a few who defend the abstract possibility of everlasting punishment by insisting that it is impossible to coerce the will, and therefore that to endless ages a soul may go on choosing evil and rejecting good. But this is an entirely new argument; it implies that a sinner *might* choose the good on the other side of death, and that if he does not, he continues eternally to pass sentence upon himself, God being helpless in the matter. This is not the way in which advocates of everlasting punishment used to talk. It is a little more hopeful than the conventional dogma, for it makes the sinner to some extent his own judge and executioner, and places stress on the undoubted truth that if a man keeps on doing wrong things he becomes hardened. I have heard this view defended in private by a bishop who apparently never saw that in adopting it he had given up entirely the orthodox Protestant view that there is no chance for a man after death, and that the thing which determines our post-mortem destiny is not our conduct, but our belief. Repentance at the eleventh hour, however bad the previous life may have been, is, according to the theology of this particular bishop, enough to secure admission to heaven. If, therefore, a power of

eternally choosing evil remains on the further side of the great change, surely there is some hope that that power might not continue to be exercised. But if not, what becomes of the whole fabric of popular Protestant theology concerning the plan of salvation, the Judgment Day, and the atoning merits of the Redeemer?

No, this kind of incoherent theologizing will not do. No one really believes it, and the Churches will have to give up professing to believe it. In our ordinary everyday concerns we take quite a different view for granted all the time, the view that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The harvest may be long in coming, but it comes at last. Neither do we choose our friends on account of their chances of heaven or hell. We like or dislike a man because he deserves to be liked or disliked, and not because he believes something that will get him into heaven. Neither, thank God, do we want to see even the wicked left to the consequences of their wickedness; we want to see them helped to live differently, and it is hardly probable that this impulse of our better humanity will change after death. Love cannot be false to itself; in the presence of need it must of necessity keep on giving itself until the need is satisfied and the victory won.

But if popular theology concerning the last things is untrue, or, at least, misleading and inadequate, what is the truth? Do we want a different set of terms or not? I think not, but

we want a different perspective. These terms ought to be construed as states of the soul, rather than as external conditions. Let me try to explain what I mean.

In the first place, if sin is selfishness, salvation must consist in ceasing to be selfish—that is, it represents the victory of love in the human heart. This may be represented as the uprising of the deeper self, the true man, the Christ man in the experience of the penitent. We may even go so far as to say that this can come about, and does come about, without any strongly marked feelings of contrition or sudden change of attitude. Wherever you see a man trying to do something for the common good, you see the uprising of the spirit of Christ; what he is doing is a part of the Atonement. In church or out of church, with or without a formal creed, this is the true way in which the redemption of the world is proceeding. Every man who is trying to live so as to make his life a blessing to the world is being saved himself in the process, saved by becoming a saviour. Ordinary observation ought to tell us that untold thousands of our fellow-beings, even among those who never dream of going to church, are being saved in this way. This is the true way to look at the matter. The Christ—the true Christ, who was, and is, Jesus, but who is also the deeper self of every human being—is saving individuals by filling them with the unselfish desire to save the race. It is this

The true salvation.

unselfish desire to minister to the common good which is the true salvation. I do not mind what name is given to it so long as it is recognized for what it really is; there is no stopping-place between sinner and saviour. This is the way in which men like Robert Blatchford, of the *Clarion*, are being saved while trying to save. Conceive how differently such a man *might* have lived his life. He might have lived it so as to be of no use to any one, or indeed in such a way as to be a hindrance rather than a help to poor overburdened humanity. It matters comparatively little that this man should think he is destroying supernaturalism and scoffs at the possibility of a future life. His moral earnestness is a mark of his Christhood, and his work a part of the Atonement. Not another Christ than Jesus, mind! The very same. Mr. Blatchford may laugh at this and call his moral aspirations by quite a different name. Well, let him; but I know the thing when I see it. This is salvation.

Conversion.

But in the history of mankind the change from selfishness to love, from darkness to light, from death to life, has often meant something much more pronounced than this. A man may have been living a bad life and become suddenly impressed by some appeal to his better nature, made in the name of God. He may have felt humiliated and distressed by his new-found consciousness of sin. He may have prayed earnestly for forgiveness, and felt that forgiveness has come, and that the peace of

God has entered into and possessed his soul. He has deliberately and solemnly consecrated his life to Jesus, and feels that henceforth he is, as it were, in a new world. This change is rightly termed conversion, a turning round and going right. Such a man may be able to say with St. Paul, "To me to live is Christ," and the words would be literally and grandly true. After this he may go on believing all kinds of things about verbal inspiration, the precious blood, the fate of the impenitent, and I know not what else, but the quality of the new life is always the same; it is dominated by the spirit of love instead of the spirit of selfishness; it is harmony with God. Often this change is very complete and beautiful, but in every case it involves a long and slow ascent to the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. It is no delusion, too, that in the endeavour to live the new life Divine help is forthcoming. The Holy Spirit of truth and love is ever present with a child of God to guide him to higher and ever higher heights of spiritual attainment. Without this blessed religious experience, the experience of those who are "called to be saints," this world would be a poor place to live in. I may perhaps be pardoned for adding that in my judgment even the earnest redemptive endeavours of men like the editor of the *Clarion* have indirectly been made possible by it. Take out of the world what Christian saints have owed to their fellowship with Jesus, and there would be comparatively

little of hope and inspiration left. Still, what I want to emphasize here is the fact that, however crude the various theologies may have been in which this experience has clothed itself, it is always the same; it represents the victory of love in the human heart.

But does this kind of salvation do away with the penal consequences of past sin? If not, what is its relation to them? To answer these questions we must look a little more closely into the nature of such penal consequences. Perhaps it would help to clear up the subject if I were to say frankly before going any farther that there is no such thing as punishment, no far-off Judgment Day, no great white throne, and no Judge external to ourselves. I say there is no punishment of sin in the sense in which the word "punishment" is usually employed. We are accustomed to think of punishment as a sentence imposed by some authority from without, and containing within itself some element of vengeance for wrong-doing. But in the Divine dealings with men such punishment has never existed, and never will. What has already been said in a previous chapter on the subject of pain should help to make this statement plain. We have seen that pain is life pressing upon death, and death resisting life. If there were no life, there would be no pain. We may say, therefore, that pain is life, or some finite expression of the universal life, seeking to burst through something that fetters and

Salvation and penalty.

hinders it. Apply this to the region of morals, and let us see how it works out. If a man has been living for self, he has been making a mistake and preparing for himself a harvest of pain, for sooner or later the Divine life within him, the truer, deeper self, will assert itself against the divisive efforts of sin. It is just as impossible for a man to go on eternally living apart from the universal life as it is for a sand castle to shut out the ocean; the returning tide will break down the puny barriers and destroy everything that tends to separate between the soul and God. For, after all, what is our life but God's? To try to keep it for ourselves is like trying to catch and imprison a sun-ray by drawing the blinds. To save the self we must serve the All. When, therefore, we remember that the spirit of man and the Spirit of God are one, we know of a surety that the infinite life behind the human spirit will assert itself irresistibly against the endeavours of sin to enclose that spirit within finite conditions. The essence of sin is the declaration, "Mine is not thine, and I shall live for mine alone." This is trying to live for the finite; it is enclosing the soul within barriers. Those barriers must be broken if the soul is to be saved, and broken they shall be, just because the deeper self of every man is already one with God. In the stable-yard of my house there must at one time have been a tree which was cut down, and the place where it grew covered with flag-stones and a wall built round it. But the roots

of the tree were not removed, and so that buried life has reasserted itself, the flag-stones have been shattered, and now the wall is coming down. Here is a figure of our moral experience. A man may go on living for self all through a long career; he may bury his better nature deep underneath the hard shell of materialism and self-indulgence, but it is all in vain; sooner or later, on this side of death or on the other, that buried life shall rise in power, and all barriers be swept away. This uprising of the Christ in the individual soul—for such it is—must inevitably mean pain to the man whose true life has been entombed in selfishness. The pain may begin here or on the further side of the change called death; but it is itself not a mark of death, but of life. The fact that a soul can suffer proves its salvability beyond dispute. An everlasting hell is in the nature of things a contradiction, for the finite cannot eternally bar the way of the infinite reality whose uprising is the cause of its pain; if it could it would itself be infinite, which is absurd. Sin is essentially the endeavour to live for the finite, the separative, the divisive, as opposed to the infinite, the whole-ward, the All. Which will win in this encounter?

And who, pray, is the judge? Who but yourself? The deeper self is the judge, the self who is eternally one with God. The pain caused by sin arises from the fact that the soul is potentially infinite and cannot have its true nature denied. If you go

The real judge.

and live over a sewer, you will be ill? Why? Because you were never meant to live over a sewer. The evil therein attacks you, and the life within you fights to overcome it, and in the process you have to suffer. It is just the same with your spiritual nature. You *cannot* continue to live apart from the whole, for the real you *is* the whole; and, do what you will, it will overcome everything within you that makes for separateness, and in the process you will have to suffer. This is what the punishment of sin means. It is life battling with death, love striving against selfishness, the deeper soul with the surface soul. It is our own spiritual nature that compels us to suffer when we sin, and there is no escaping the sentence; if we sin we must suffer, for we are so constituted that what sin does love with toil and pain must undo. No eleventh-hour repentance can evade the issue; in fact, it may be the beginning of it. If we have been treading a wrong road, repentance is turning round and taking the way back. If we have been living a false life, repentance is the beginning of the true; and just in proportion as the false has been accepted, so will the true find it difficult to destroy the lie. *You* are the judge; you *in* God. If you have failed to achieve that for which you are here, you will have to achieve it, here or elsewhere; and the correction of your failure will inevitably mean pain.

"The tissues of the life to be
We weave with colours all our own,
And in the field of destiny
We reap as we have sown."

There is nothing horrific about this law of the spirit. In a true and real sense it is our own law; *we* make it. Being what we are, we cannot let ourselves off. Pain is at once the consequence of sin and the token of our Divine lineage. But there is nothing individualistic about this sinning and suffering. All the love in the universe comes to the help of the soul that tries to rise. It will even enter the prison-house along with it, and accept the cross in the endeavour to hasten the emancipation of the sin-bound soul. In fact, it must do so, for as long as there is any sin to be done away love cannot have its perfect work. This it was which brought Jesus to earth, and this it is which turns every follower of Jesus into a saviour. Love must strive and suffer with sin until God is all in all.

It follows from this that the true resurrection is spiritual, not material, and this is the sense in which the word is most frequently employed in the New Testament. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is represented as saying, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." This is a great saying, and the writer of this particular Gospel meant every word of it in the sense I have just indicated. He makes the eternal Christ speak in terms of the earthly Jesus, and tells us that the uprising of this eternal Christ within the soul of the penitent sinner is the real resurrection.

The spiritual resurrection.

But this subject of the resurrection demands a further examination. We have already seen how inconsistent popular Christian doctrine is about the matter, and yet Christianity started with the belief in a resurrection of our Lord—a belief which has continued down to the present day. What are we to say about this?

The resurrection of Jesus.

We may as well admit at the outset that the Gospel accounts of the physical resurrection of Jesus are mutually inconsistent, and that no amount of ingenuity can reconcile them. Matthew speaks of a Galilean appearance, and says nothing about the ascension. Luke says a great deal about the Jerusalem appearances, nothing about Galilee, and tells us that the ascension took place from Bethany. The original ending of Mark's Gospel has been lost, and the last few verses of the existing version are a summary of the accounts in the other Gospels concerning the post-resurrection appearances of the Lord. John's version is, of course, less historical than the synoptists, and puts the last appearance at the sea of Tiberias. A minute discussion of the problem thus raised would be unprofitable for our present purpose; but I hope we can take for granted the broad fact that, without a belief in a resurrection of some kind, Christianity could not have made a start at all. It is almost indisputable that, in some way or other, the disciples must have become convinced that they had seen Jesus face to face after the world believed Him to be dead and buried. The earliest apostolic

utterance on the subject in the New Testament is the familiar passage from 1 Cor. xv.: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." This statement is clear enough, and almost unquestionably authentic. It places beyond doubt what the Apostolic Church thought of the resurrection of Jesus. The little group of disciples must somehow have become convinced that their Master was not really dead, but alive and reigning in the world unseen, interested as much as ever in the work His followers were doing, and spiritually present with them in the doing of it. This conviction had immediate and important spiritual results. It gave these simple men a new and greater confidence in Jesus and in the power of the life He had lived. They saw that this life was, after all, the strongest thing in the universe. They realized that in the end nothing could stand against it; evil could do it no real harm, for God was behind it. Even before the crucifixion they had looked upon Jesus as the Son

of God in a higher and more spiritual sense than that title had been used before, but now henceforth they thought of Him as such in a higher way still. According to Paul, He was "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." If we try to put ourselves in the place of these first Christians, we shall realize better the effect of the resurrection upon their feelings and behaviour. Let us suppose that we had known Jesus in the flesh, that we had learned to understand a little of the moral and spiritual beauty of the ideal revealed in His life, and that afterwards we had seen Him die in blood and shame; I think it would have taken a good deal to convince us that evil had not gained the day. Now, suppose after this we had absolute proof—I will not say how—that our Master was still alive, and that His spirit was with us and helping us, would it not make a very great difference to our outlook upon life and our confidence in God? We could not but feel the littleness of the power that had tried to destroy Jesus, and we should not be afraid of it any more. This is precisely what appears to have happened in the experience of these Galileans. Defeat and failure were somehow turned into victory and success; they had seen Jesus again.

But how are we to account for this new-found confidence of theirs that they had really once more looked upon the face of Jesus? The subject has been discussed so exhaustively that

no possible explanation of it has been left altogether untouched. Such a unique event as the raising of a physical body from death is one which the average Western mind of the present day would reject as incredible if we had never heard it before, consequently there exists a widespread tendency among liberal Christians to try to account for primitive Christian belief in the resurrection of our Lord in some other way. Thus we have the hallucination theory, the apparition theory, the swoon theory, and others of a similar character. I suppose that most thinkers who take the point of view of the New Theology would hold one or other of these explanations or some modification of them; but I confess I have never seen the overwhelming necessity for doing so. No such explanation of the universally held Christian conviction that the physical body of Jesus actually rose from the tomb is altogether sufficient to account for it. The passage already quoted from 1 Cor. xv. is alone enough to illustrate this statement. It is fairly clear that the earliest Christians were convinced that the body of Jesus after the resurrection was the body of Jesus as they had known it before, although apparently it possessed some new and mysterious attributes. In my judgment also, insistence upon the impossibility of a physical resurrection presumes an essential distinction between matter and spirit which I cannot admit. The philosophy underlying the New Theology, as I understand it, is monistic idealism,

Theories of resurrection.

and monistic idealism recognizes no fundamental distinction between matter and spirit. The fundamental reality is consciousness. The so-called material world is the product of consciousness exercising itself along a certain limited plane; the next stage of consciousness above this is not an absolute break with it, although it is an expansion of experience or readjustment of focus. Admitting that individual self-consciousness persists beyond the change called "death," it only means that such consciousness is being exercised along another plane; from a three-dimensional it has entered a four-dimensional world. This new world is no less and no more material than the present; it is all a question of the range of consciousness. It is this view—the view that matter exists only in and for mind—that leads me to believe that less than justice has been done by liberal thinkers to the theory of the physical resurrection of Jesus. What is the physical but the common denominator between one finite mind and another? It is a mode of language, an expression of thought, as well as a condition of thought. Imagine a being free of a three-dimensional world trying to converse with a being still limited to a two-dimensional world, and we have a clue to what I think may possibly have happened after the crucifixion of Jesus. The three-dimensional body would behave in a manner altogether unaccountable to the two-dimensional watcher. The latter, knowing only length and breadth, and nothing of up or down, would see his three-

dimensional friend as a line only. The moment the three-dimensional solid rose above or sank below his line of vision, it would seem to have disappeared like an apparition, although as really present as before. To the two-dimensional mind it would seem as though the solid were a ghost. Does this throw any light upon the mysterious appearances and disappearances of the body of Jesus? The all-important thing after Calvary was to make the disciples aware, beyond all dispute, that Jesus was really alive, more alive than ever, and that His murderers had been helpless to destroy Him. When we remember that to the ordinary Jewish mind the thought of personal immortality was anything but clear, and that to many of them death was synonymous with annihilation, we can see how enormous was the change that had to be wrought in the mental attitude of those who had seen Jesus die a violent and bloody death. To see him return triumphant was the one thing required to counteract their feeling that all was lost, and the best means of demonstrating this victory over death was to enable them to behold Him in the body with which they were already familiar and which they loved so well. For, after all, that body was but a thought-form, a kind of language, a mode of communication between mind and mind; it was no more and no less a thought-form than an apparition would have been, and, from the point of view of monistic idealism, it is no more difficult to believe in the reanimation of a physical

body than in the use of any other thought-form to express a fact of consciousness. Here, then, we have a being whose consciousness belongs to the fourth-dimensional plane adjusting Himself to the capacity of those on a three-dimensional plane for the sake of proving to them beyond dispute that—

> "Life is ever lord of death,
> And love can never lose its own."

This seems to me a not unreasonable explanation of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and the impression produced by them on the minds of His disciples. Most of my New Theology friends will probably reject it at first sight, but at least it is consistent with the philosophic position assumed throughout this book, and appears on the whole to present fewer difficulties than any other in face of the New Testament accounts. I do not insist upon it: it is purely hypothetical, but so is every theory of this great event which has occupied the field until the present moment. I do not put this one forward with the same confidence as I adopt the spiritual positions indicated in the preceding chapters of this book, for the question is on an entirely different footing. All I am concerned to show is that something may still be said for the primitive belief in the manner of the resurrection of Jesus without vitiating any of the principles of the New Theology.

No theory of the Resurrection of Jesus is

absolutely indispensable or of first-rate importance; the main thing to be agreed upon is that Christianity started with the belief that its Founder had risen from the dead in order to demonstrate that death has no power to destroy anything worthy of God. In consonance with this idealistic view of the subject, the ascension becomes understandable; it only means that when Jesus had done what He wanted the body was dissipated. No doubt primitive Christian thought naïvely regarded heaven as a place above the sky to which the physical body actually went, and Hades, or the under-world, as the place from which the spirit of Jesus returned to reanimate it before ascending to the abode of the Father. Plainly enough, this is what Paul thought about it, but such a conception is now impossible to any one; it could only exist under a geocentric view of the universe which has long since passed away. But when Paul speaks even about the resurrection of the saints, this is what he means. All the good who have died are waiting in the under-world, the shadowy home of the departed, in a state of existence which is only a sort of dream or sleep compared with that which they have left. From this under-world Jesus returned, "the firstfruits of them that slept." All who believe in Him will do the same sooner or later, will resume their physical bodies, and, like Him, ascend to the world above the sky. But seeing this geocentric cosmogony has been impossible for centuries past, why

should we go on trying to squeeze Paul's language so as to mean something else than what it meant at first? Granted that he was right in believing, in company with all the rest of the primitive Church, that Jesus showed Himself to the disciples after His crucifixion, what more do we need? Paul's theory as to the resurrection of every physical human body is just nonsense in the light of our larger knowledge of the universe and its laws, and we may as well say so.

Paul's mystical view of resurrection.

But we should do Paul an injustice if we were to limit the value of his utterances by his views about the resurrection of the human body. I have already pointed out that Paul employs physical symbols in a mystical way, and in nothing was this more so than in his use of the idea of a resurrection. With him, as with the writer of the Fourth Gospel, the spiritual resurrection was the uprising, going forward, issuing forth of the Christ or Divine man within the soul. When he speaks in this way he allows the thought of a physical resurrection to drop out of sight. Thus he writes: "If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." "If then ye be risen with Christ, seek the things

which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. . . . For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Even if this last sentence is not Paul's own, it has a distinctly Pauline ring. In his maturer thought the great apostle seems to have escaped the limitations of his early Pharisaism. He ceases to speak of the sleep or the under-world, and begins to think of death as the gateway to the immediate presence of his dearly loved Master. "For I long to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." Here, surely, we are listening to the voice of Paul the aged.

The moment we succeed in disentangling ourselves from all literal and limiting New Testament statements about the connection between sin and physical death, the physical resurrection, the distant Judgment Day, and such-like, we find ourselves in a position to appreciate the beautiful spiritual experience in which these very terms become symbols of inner realities of the soul. Till we can do this, New Testament language is sure to be a hindrance to any true apprehension of the moral value of the gospel of Christ. The only salvation we need trouble about is the change from selfishness to love: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love." This change is equivalent to a resurrection, the uprising of the eternal Christ within us. It is also an ascension, the uplifting and uniting of the soul to the eternal Father. But such a resurrection and ascension may be preceded by a great deal

of pain when the soul is shedding the husk of selfishness. There is no dodging the consequences of sin; that is absolutely impossible. A saviour may suffer with and for the sinner, but the sinner must suffer too. The suffering is not a mark of God's anger, but of His love; so far from salvation being a means of screening us from it, the pain is a means by which the salvation takes effect. It is the true self asserting its dominion over the false. Heaven and hell are states of the soul, and the latter implies the former. It is life that suffers, not death. When a guilty soul awakens to the truth, hell begins, but it is because heaven wants to break through. The aim and object of salvation are not the getting of a man into heaven, but the getting of heaven into him. There is nothing horrifying about the law of retribution, although it is inexorable in its operation. It is an evidence of our Divine origin, our own true being asserting itself against the fetters of evil. But it is the Christ that saves us, not the retribution; the retribution only shows that the Christ is there, and that from the Calvary caused by sin, and from the tomb in which the true self lies buried, He will rise in glorious majesty in the soul, and unite us in the bonds of love to the eternal Divine humanity, which is God.

It follows from what has now been said that all these familiar terms imply each other, and that death, judgment, heaven, and hell cannot properly be regarded as the "Last Things."

They are all here now, here within the soul, just as infinity and eternity are here now. It is not a matter of hither and yonder, but of higher and lower. Physical death is not the all-important event which theologians have usually made it out to be; it is only a bend in the road. My own impression is that when we individually pass through this crisis we shall find the change to be very slight. It will mean the dropping of the scales from the eyes, and that is about all. The things we have been living for on this side will only profit us in so far as they have gone to the building up of a Christ-like character. If a man has been living for false and unworthy ideals he will quickly find it out; the only possession he can take to the other side of death is what he is. Belief in the atoning merits and the finished work of a Saviour will not compensate for wasted opportunities and selfish deeds; these latter will light the fires of retribution as the soul awakes to its true condition, and then, and not till then, perhaps, will the indwelling Christ obtain His opportunity. Nor will the absence of a formal creed shut any good man out of heaven; it is impossible to shut a man out from what he *is*. What we sow we reap, and we do so just because of what we fundamentally are. Every road to evil ends in a *cul-de-sac*. Sooner or later every soul will have to learn that it is no use kicking against the pricks; we must learn by the consequences

Physical death of minor importance.

of our mistakes that, being what we are, the children of the Highest, we cannot permanently rest in anything less than the love of God. Salvation and Atonement are just as operative on the other side of death as on this. The blind soul goes on for a while in its blundering selfishness, and the Christ spirit, the spirit of universal love, goes on seeking to win it to the truth. In the end the truth must prevail, if only because we shall have to learn that the lie is not worth while.

Evidence for immortality of the soul.

No doubt there are some readers of these pages who profess themselves agnostic or indifferent with regard to the question of immortality, and I am not going to argue with them. It seems to me probable that before very long it will be impossible to deny it. The mass of evidence for the persistence of individual self-consciousness after death is increasing rapidly, and is being subjected to the strictest scientific investigation. Men like Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge, men whose words are entitled to respect from the point of view of modern science, have publicly admitted the importance of such evidence; before long the scientific world in general will have to take it into consideration. But to me such evidence does not greatly matter, and I know very little about it at first hand. I build my belief in immortality on the conviction that the fundamental reality of the universe is consciousness, and that no

consciousness can ever be extinguished, for it belongs to the whole, and must be fulfilled in the whole. The one unthinkable supposition from this point of view is that any kind of being which has ever become aware of itself, that is, has ever contained a ray of the eternal consciousness, can perish.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

FROM the consideration of the true significance of such terms as Salvation, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell, we now turn to one which might be thought to occupy a relatively inferior position, and to precede them in order of time. But if we have been right in holding that such terms as we have already examined represent states of the soul beginning here and now, we have considered them in their rightful place, for now we have to see how these states of the soul find expression in human institutions. In a word, I wish to devote some space to the consideration of the great subjects of the Church and the Kingdom of God in relation to one another. What is the Church? Where did the idea spring from? What had Jesus to do with it originally? What is the Kingdom of God, and how do the various Christian societies which call themselves Churches stand in regard to it to-day? To answer any of these questions we must try to place ourselves to some extent in the intellectual and moral atmosphere of those amongst whom

Order of the subject.

the ideas first arose. Let us take the kingdom first.

At the time when Jesus came every person of Jewish nationality was looking for the establishment of what had come to be called the Kingdom of God. For many generations the Jews had been a subject race. There had been one brief period of national splendour and prosperity, namely, the reigns of David and Solomon. After generations were inclined to idealize these two reigns, especially the former, and to look upon them as a kind of golden age. David they looked upon as an ideal monarch; they called him a "man after God's own heart," and the imagination of poet and prophet loved to dwell upon his winsome personality. They thought of him as in a special way the king chosen by God, and the Israel of his time as a true Kingdom of God—a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and plenty under the favour of the Most High. The real Israel of David's day was far different from this, but compared with the days that followed it was indeed a time of unexampled greatness. A similar tendency to idealize the past is observable in nearly every nation which has entered upon a period of suffering or misfortune, as we can see from the legends about King Olaf and Frederick Barbarossa. But Israel always looked upon herself as in a special way a theocratic kingdom—a chosen of God. At its best this idea was a fine

Origin of the idea of the Kingdom of God.

one, it led to the thought of a special spiritual vocation for the sake of the other nations of the earth; at its worst it meant the assertion of national privilege and contempt for everything which was not Jewish. After the great captivity in Babylon the Jews were never without a foreign master, and the northern kingdom of Israel disappeared from history. But in quite a remarkable way Jewish poets and preachers united to keep alive the popular belief that God would yet "restore the kingdom to Israel." Hence there grew up a firmly held conviction that God would some time raise up a prince born of David's line, who with supernatural help, and with a strong hand, would drive out the invader and establish a kingdom which would outshine even that of David himself. This was the root idea of the Kingdom of God, as we meet it in the New Testament, and as it is described in some of the most beautiful passages of the Old.

The Messiah of Jewish expectation.

As time went on, this idea was deepened and clarified, and became more and more associated in popular expectation with the advent of the Messianic deliverer, whose work it should be to inaugurate it. At the time when Jesus was born, this expectation had become very keen. Every one was thinking of it, from Pharisees and scribes downwards. At the moment the foreign master was the Roman, whose rule, though milder than that of the Ptolemies, was quite severe enough; the

people were impoverished and unhappy. What they were looking for was a Messiah, a transcendent but quite human personality of royal descent, who should expel the Roman eagles and inaugurate suddenly and completely an era of peace and prosperity, the like of which had never been known before, a true kingdom of God. One extension of this idea was that Israel should replace the Roman Empire as the suzerain of all the other nations of the earth.

> "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. . . . And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. . . . The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

This fine passage shows pretty clearly what

was the general idea as to the nature of the anticipated kingdom of God. It meant that the Jewish Messiah was to take the place of Cæsar and reign with undisputed sway from his capital of Jerusalem.

But we should do an injustice to the subject if we failed to allow for the fact that, according to the prophetic ideal, this kingdom was to be a blessing to the world, and to abolish all violence and oppression; the Kingdom of God was to be a kingdom of universal peace and joy, a kingdom of righteousness based on social justice. It was because of this widespread expectation that the austere preacher John the Baptist obtained his hearing in the wilderness of Judea. All John had to preach about was the Kingdom of God, which he declared to be near at hand. He believed that he had been sent to herald the coming of the Messiah, and from his words we can gather what people thought about the Messiah: "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." According to the Baptist, the Messiah would spare no kind of sham or hypocrisy; He would root out and utterly destroy every kind of social evil, no matter what. John insisted that it would be of no use for Jews to imagine that simply because they were descendants of Abraham they would escape this general visitation; hence his words to the Pharisees were particularly scathing: "O

generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" It is clear, therefore, that, in the opinion of the man who has now come to be regarded as the forerunner of Jesus, the Kingdom of God was to be an earthly kingdom, was to come suddenly, and was to be inaugurated by a sort of general judgment or clean sweep of all the elements that made for oppression, cruelty, foul living, and pretentiousness of every kind. It had not the remotest reference to a world to come or a Divine Redeemer whose principal duty it should be to suffer and die in order to secure a blessed immortality for those who believed in Him.

How far Jesus shared these ideas at the commencement of His own ministry it is impossible to say, but it seems clear that He was attracted by the moral earnestness of John, and wished to associate Himself with those who were looking for a kingdom of God which should mean the establishment and realization of the moral ideal in all human relations. But at the baptism a purpose long forming in His mind appears to have taken definite shape. He felt Himself called to preach the good news of a kingdom which could begin at once in the heart of any man who was willing to become the instrument of Divine love and the expression of the ideal of human brotherhood. He went into the wilderness to think this out and then came back to teach it. I do not think He imagined that it could be realized quickly

Jesus' idea of the kingdom.

and easily, but it seems fairly obvious that at first He expected that men would be so glad to hear about it that they would hasten to avail themselves of it. All through His ministry He spoke of little else, and it was because of what He had to say about the nature of the kingdom that His followers were attracted to Him. Hence, too, we have the deathless teaching preserved for us in the synoptical gospels: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The meaning of Jesus is perfectly clear and perfectly simple. It is that if a kingdom of universal brotherhood is ever to be realized on earth it can only come by the operation of universal goodwill. This has been much too simple for most of the theologians, and so they have endeavoured to twist and torture it out of all recognition. As time went on, however, Jesus came to see that it would not be realized as quickly as even He had thought. Men could not or would not understand; they were looking for a kingdom which should mean plenty to eat and drink, and universal dominion for the sons of Abraham. Even His most immediate followers were unable to divest themselves of this notion, and it is plain enough that they went on hoping even to the end that Jesus would head a revolt and establish a kingdom in which they themselves would hold positions of dignity and importance: "Grant that we may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left,

in Thy kingdom." The striking rebuke which Jesus administered to these pretensions, by setting a little child in the midst of the jealous men, will never be forgotten while the world lasts. Jesus did believe in an earthly kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, but it is evident that He would have nothing to say to violence as a means of realizing it. He even believed that the kingdom had already come in the heart of any man who was desirous of being at one with God and man and denied himself in the effort to do it: "And when He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the Kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."

Early Christian idea of the kingdom.

An important fact, which I do not think is generally recognized, is that the first Christians thought almost precisely what the Jews did about the Kingdom of God. Most people are accustomed to think of Christianity as having been from the first a religion which had principally to do with getting men ready for the next world. We can hardly think about it apart from ecclesiastical buildings, choirs, baptisms, confirmations, prayers for the sick and dying, and so on. So much have we been accustomed to think of it in this way that the average man reads his New Testament with these assumptions in the background of his mind. But this is certainly not New Testament

Christianity. The apostles and their followers believed, like the Jews, in the sudden establishment of an ideal commonwealth upon earth. This was how they understood the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." They did not even wish to separate from Judaism, and it is evident from Paul's letters that there was at one time a great danger that the new faith might become a mere Jewish sect. The Christians differed from the Jews, not in their ideal concerning the kingdom, but in their greater moral intensity and enthusiasm, as well as in their profound conviction that the Lord Jesus was God's chosen instrument for realizing this kingdom, and that He would presently return to earth and do it. Any unbiassed reader of the New Testament can see for himself that the primitive Christians lived in hourly expectation that this was what would happen. Of course, they also believed in their Master's continual spiritual presence with them, but the dominant thought in their minds was that of a dramatic second coming, and the inauguration of a reign of righteousness and universal peace, the making of a beautiful world, something like the Utopia of Mr. H. G. Wells. Nor was this altogether a delusion. If it had been, Christianity would soon have died. But, on the contrary, it lived and grew because of the great truth behind this belief, namely, that the Spirit of Christ working in the hearts of men is gradually producing this ideal kingdom in our midst.

If, with this view of the character of early Christianity in our minds, we go afresh to the gospels, or to the letters of Paul, we shall find it abundantly confirmed. There is no getting away from it. All the earnestness and enthusiasm of the first Christians were centred upon the belief in the near advent of a Divine kingdom upon earth, with Jesus as its head. This belief even affected the practice of these early Christians in regard to the disposal of their property. To understand this, let us put ourselves in their place, and ask what we should do if we were possessed by the conviction that the whole existing social order might come to an end to-morrow morning or next week, and that after that no child of God would ever want for anything. I think we should be sure to feel that the holding of personal property would not matter much. If, in addition to this, our hearts were filled with a Divine enthusiasm, an overmastering love for Jesus and for all our brethren, we should not want to keep anything back that could serve to make any one happier for the short time that intervened before the glorious coming of the Lord. This was just how the primitive Christians felt. They had no organized economic system; no one was compelled to give anything, but under the pressure of the new spirit they willingly gave everything. What did it matter? they thought; they were only like pilgrims within sight of home, or watchers waiting for the morning.

Where, then, did the idea of the Church come from? It is as plain as anything can be that the primary interest of early Christianity was the Kingdom of God. It took the conception over from Judaism with a deeper moral content derived from the preaching and the life of Jesus. Its first adherents did not even know that they had a new religion; they only thought they had found the true Messiah, although the Jewish nation as a whole had rejected Him. What they wanted above everything was to see the kingdom come upon earth, and we now know that they were mistaken in imagining that it would be established speedily and suddenly by the visible second coming of Jesus on the clouds of heaven. But seeing that they were thinking of it in this way, how did the Church arise, and why?

Origin of the idea of the Church.

It is doubtful if Jesus ever used the word "Church," for the two verses in Matthew, in which He is credited with it, are probably of late date, and point to a time when the ecclesiastical organization was fairly well established. Still, the word itself has an interest and a history of its own, apart from its Christian use. The *ecclesia*, as most of my readers may be aware, was the assembly of the citizens of any Greek city-state. It was the custom for the whole body of the members of a Greek self-governing community to be called together from time to time for the transaction of public business. This assembly was the final authority in matters

affecting the communal welfare, and even after the various Greek states became absorbed in the Roman Empire, this custom was allowed to continue. It was the policy of the Romans to permit a large measure of self-government to their subjects of any alien race, and therefore the *ecclesia* of any particular city-state continued to be summoned as usual to decide upon matters of local importance. There is a reference to this in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts, where we read that the preaching of Christianity in Ephesus caused a riot, which the town clerk—a thoroughly typical town clerk!—succeeded in allaying by reminding the demonstrators that if they had any real cause for complaint the matter ought to come before the regular *ecclesia.* This properly constituted *ecclesia,* to which the level-headed town clerk referred, was the general assembly of the citizens for the transaction of public business.

It was quite natural that the primitive Christians should have come to adopt this word, and to an extent this very idea, as a convenient description of the new Christian community. After the departure of their Master, the Christians held together, and wherever their missionaries went new communities sprang up, animated by a spirit of loyalty to Jesus and a desire to realize His ideal for mankind. It was quite natural, too, that the apostles should recognize all these communities as being in reality one community of fellowship of faith and

love; it was the *ecclesia*, or assembly, or society of Jesus, the beginning of the Church of Christ, as it soon came to be called. There was no elaborate organization; nothing could have been simpler. Every Christian seems to have thought that as it would not be long before the Master came again, the wise and right thing to do was for His followers to hold together, and witness Him to the world, until that great event took place.

Church only exists for the sake of the Kingdom.

But how far did Jesus foresee and intend this? It is difficult to say; but His choice of twelve apostles, whom He carefully trained to continue His work, is evidence that He contemplated the formation of some kind of society to give effect to His teaching. The number twelve points to the probability that He thought of this society as a kind of new Israel, a spiritual Israel, which should do for the world what the older Israel had failed to do, that is, bring about the kingdom of God. I have already pointed out that, in my judgment, Jesus did not believe, as His contemporaries did, that that kingdom could be established suddenly from without, but held that it could only be achieved by spiritual forces working from within. His *ecclesia* has lived and grown. It has survived for nineteen centuries, and is likely to survive for many centuries more. It has played a leading part in the making of modern civilization. But it is no longer a unity, and many different theories exist as to its

meaning and worth. Broadly speaking, however, there are two outstanding views as to the scope and function of the *ecclesia* or Church of Jesus. One is the sacerdotal, and the other is what, for want of a better name, I may term the evangelical. In outline the former is as follows: Before Jesus finally withdrew His bodily presence from His disciples, He formally constituted a religious society to represent Him on earth. This society was to be the ark of salvation, the "sphere of covenanted grace." Its principal work was to call men out of a lost and ruined world and secure for them a blessed immortality; those who were members of this Church, and only they, were certain of heaven. Membership therein was clearly defined; the gateway was baptism. Those who were baptized in a proper way, even though they were unconscious infants, were members of the Church of Christ, and all others were outside. Within this sacred society souls were to be trained in rightness of living, and, to an extent, made fit for heaven. The Holy Spirit abiding in this society would sanctify the individual members and guide them into all the truth. It is even held that Jesus definitely appointed the way in which this Church was to be governed. Its affairs were to be managed by a threefold order—bishops, priests, and deacons. But here a division has taken place amongst the sacerdotalists themselves, owing to the necessity of finding some final authority, some living voice,

The sacerdotal theory.

within this visible society, to which appeal in the last resort could be made. Romanists have found this in the Bishop of Rome, whom they regard as the episcopal successor of the Apostle Peter. Devout Anglicans take their stand upon the faith as defined by the first four general Councils, while in administrative matters they regard the bishop as independent. The Greek Church also insists upon its autonomy.

This sacerdotal view has exercised enormous influence in Christian history, and I have sufficient of the historic imagination to be able to say that at certain periods it has undoubtedly worked on the whole for good. But did Jesus really found a Church of this kind? I am quite sure He never thought of such a thing, and historical criticism of Christian origins does not leave the sacerdotalist much to stand on. Jesus appointed neither bishop nor priest, and never ordained that any merely mechanical ceremony should be the means of admission to the Christian society or be necessary to the eternal welfare of any one. In the early Church the bishop or elder was the president of the little Christian society meeting in any particular locality. Primitive Christian organization was anything but rigid and formal, and was as far as possible from the sacerdotal model. I do not say that the sacerdotal mode of organization which gradually grew up was wholly mischievous, nor do I say that the primitive Christian organization would be the best under

all circumstances. All I maintain is that in founding His new society Jesus did not ordain any particular form of organization.

The other view of the meaning of the word "Church," to which I have already referred, is that it is the totality of the followers of Jesus. Under this view organization is a secondary matter. There are many reasons why Christian societies should organize themselves differently from one another. Temperament plays a great part in the matter. But theories of Church government have ceased to be the burning question that they once were. Most sensible men are now satisfied that forms of government matter much less than the kind of life which flourishes in the society itself.

The evangelical theory.

But what does the Church exist for, using the word in its primitive sense? What ought it to exist for to-day? What is the justification for all the vast number of Christian organizations which exist throughout the world? This is a subject upon which a clear note needs to be sounded, for a great deal of mental confusion exists in regard to it. Two inconsistent views of the work of the Church, as well as of the constitution of the Church, have come down the ages together, and exist side by side in the world to-day. The first is that the chief business of the Church is to snatch men as brands from the burning and get them ready for a future heaven. The Fall theory has had much to do with this. The assumption

What the Church exists for to-day.

behind it is, as we have seen, that the world is a city of destruction, as Bunyan calls it. It is a ruined world, a world which has somehow baffled and disappointed God, a failure of a world which, when the cup of its iniquity is full, will be utterly destroyed at a general judgment. When that dreadful day comes it will be bad for all those who are outside the fellowship of Christ, for, like those who have died without availing themselves of the means of salvation, they will be relegated to everlasting torment in the world unseen. This view of the fate of the world as being at enmity with God, and of the duty of the Church to persuade as many as possible to believe something or other in order to secure salvation in a future and better world, has been held by sacerdotalists and non-sacerdotalists, Catholics and Protestants alike. It is still implied in most of our preaching and in the hymns we sing. I admit that there is a certain truth in it, the truth that man is constituted for immortality and ought not to live as if this world were all that mattered. But, on the whole, it has been thoroughly mischievous, and there is nothing which is acting as a greater hindrance to the spirituality and usefulness of the churches to-day. It is based on an entirely false idea as to the relation of God and the world.

But alongside of this view a far higher and nobler one has been present to the minds of Christians in every century—namely, that the work of the Church is to save the world and to

believe that it is worth the saving. If what I have already said be true, this is the idea which was in the mind of Jesus when He founded His *ecclesia.* To Him the purpose of the *ecclesia* was to help to realize the Kingdom of God by preaching and living the fellowship of love. Ever since His day those who have been nearest to Him in spirit have been going forth into the dark places of the earth trying to win men to the realization of the great ideal of a universal fellowship of love based on a common relationship to the God and Father of us all. This is what Augustine aimed at in his City of God. It was what Ambrose had in mind when he excommunicated the Emperor Theodosius for having ordered a cruel massacre of some of his rebellious subjects. It was the ideal of the mighty Hildebrand, grim and arrogant though he was, when he compelled princes to bow their haughty necks and do justice to the weak. It was what Bernard of Clairvaux meant to declare when he defied the cruel and sensual King of France to approach the altar of Christ. Savonarola realized it for a brief moment in Florence, Calvin in Geneva, the Covenanters in Scotland, the Puritans in England, the Pilgrim Fathers in America. They all failed because the world can never be saved by the imposition of ideal institutions from without and by force; it can only be by the Spirit of Christ working from within. But to some extent they all succeeded too, for the

To save the world.

world is a better place to live in because of the gradual and cumulative redemptive effort of the Christian *ecclesia*, the Church of Jesus. On the other side of the ledger we have to set many things that ecclesiasticism has done—cruel persecutions, infamous tortures, burnings and massacres, devastating wars, and fierce religious hatreds. But these things have never belonged to Jesus; they are the very negation of His spirit. The true Church of Christ in any and every age consists of those, and those only, who are trying, like their Master, to make the world better and gladder and worthier of God. The word "Church" has become so hateful to many because of the admixture of other ideals with this that I sometimes wish something could be done either to get rid of it or to change it for another which should fully and clearly express what Jesus really came to do. I maintain that the Church has nothing whatever to do with preparing men for a world to come. The best way to prepare a man for the world beyond is to get him to live well and truly in this one. The Church exists to make the world a Kingdom of God, and to fill it with His love. No greater mistake could be made than to estimate the Church of Jesus by ecclesiastical squabbles and divisions, or even by Psalm-singing and go-to-meeting talk. Look for the spirit of Jesus at work and you have found the Church too.

Judged by this standard, where are the Churches to-day? We have seen that the only

gospel which Jesus had to preach was the gospel of the Kingdom of God; everything He ever said can be included under that head. His Church, or Christian society, or whatever else we like to call it, has no meaning unless it exists for the realization of the kingdom of God. We cannot state this too strongly. The whole of the other-worldism of the Churches, the elaborate paraphernalia of doctrine and observance, is utterly useless, and worse than useless, unless it ministers to this end. Unless it can be shown that I am wrong in this supposition—and I think that will be pretty hard to do—a fairly good case could be made out for burning down most of the theological colleges in the land, and sending the bright young fellows in them to do some serious work for the common good. For it must be confessed, as I said at the beginning, that the Churches are to a large extent a failure. We cannot but recognize, for one thing, that our modern civilization, with all its boasted advance on the past, is still unchristian. It puts a premium upon selfishness. Modern industrialism is cruel and unjust, and directly incites men to self-seeking. The weak and unfortunate have to go to the wall. Little mercy is shown to the man who is not strong enough to fight his way and keep his footing in the struggle for existence. We are all the time making war upon one another, man against man, business against business, class against class, nation against

Modern industrialism and the Church.

nation. We talk of our freedom; but no man is really free, and the great majority of us are slaves to some corporation, or capitalist, or condition of things, which renders the greater part of life a continuous anxiety lest health or means should fail, and we should prove unequal to the demands made upon us. If a man goes under, his acquaintances will pity him for five minutes, and then forget all about him. There is no help for it; they cannot do anything else; they have their own living to get. They are like soldiers in the heat of battle; they must not pause to mourn over a fallen comrade, or they may soon be stretched beside him. I do not mean, of course, to make the foolish statement that present-day industrialism is unrestrainedly individualistic; thank God, it is not that. But the principle of competition still exercises a sway so potent as to stamp modern social organization as unchristian. We may just as well recognize that fact and state it plainly. The glaringly unequal ownership of material wealth is anti-social; it is good neither for the rich man nor for the poor, for it is to the interest of every man that the body politic should be healthy and happy. That so large a number of our total population should have to exist upon the very margin of subsistence is a moral wrong. We have no business to have any slums or sweating-dens, or able-bodied unemployed, or paupers. Poverty, dulness of brain, and coarseness of habit are often found in close association. Some

amount of material endowment is required even for the development of the intelligence and the training of the moral faculties. Wealth possesses no value in itself; it only possesses value as a means to more abundant life. If there is one thing upon which Christianity insists more than another, it is the duty of caring for the weak and sinful; but at present this duty is only recognized to a very limited extent.

In what I am now saying, I am well aware that I have come to a phase of my subject which thousands of my countrymen are stating so clearly and forcibly as to compel attention; but what I want to show is that the present unideal condition of the civilized world is an indictment of the Churches and their conventional doctrines. We seem to have forgotten our origin. I have long felt, as I suppose every Christian minister must feel, the antagonism between the Christian standard of conduct and that required in ordinary business life. There is no blinking the fact that the standard of Christ and the standard of the commercial world are not the same. Our work is to make them the same, and to that end we must destroy the social system which makes selfishness the rule, and compels a man to act upon his lower motives, and we must put a better in its place. We must establish a social order wherein a man can be free to be his best, and to give his best to the community without crushing or destroying any one else. In a word, we want

Christianity and Collectivism.

Collectivism in the place of competition; we want the Kingdom of God. Charity is no remedy for our social ills and their moral outcome; the only remedy is a new social organization on a Christian basis. I do not believe that any form of Collectivism, as a mere system superposed from without, can ever really make the world happy; it must be the expression of the spirit of brotherhood working from within. Neither do I feel much faith in any sudden and cataclysmic reformation of society. The history of Christendom proves that no institution can be much in advance of human nature and survive. Covenanters and Puritans found that out when they tried to make men godly by Act of Parliament; Savonarola found it out when the wild passions of the Florentines, restrained for a brief hour, broke their chains and destroyed him; the Christians of New Testament times found it out when their beautiful experiment of social brotherhood came to an end in the horror and darkness of the break-up of Jewish national life. But at least we can recognize the presence of the guiding Spirit of God in all our social concerns, and work along with it for the realization of the ideal of universal brotherhood. We can show men what Jesus really came to do, and, as His servants, we can help Him to do it. We can definitely recognize that the movement towards social regeneration is really and truly a spiritual movement, and that it must never be captured by materialism. I deplore the fact that, for the

moment, the main current of the great Labour movement which, perhaps more than any other, represents the social application of the Christian ideal, should appear to be out of touch with organized religion. This cannot continue, for I observe that the men who lead it are men of moral passion, and often men of simple religious faith. It could hardly be otherwise. It seems to me in the nature of things impossible to sustain a belief in a moral ideal without some kind of belief in God; and assuredly God is with these men in the work they are doing and have yet to do. In fact, the Labour Party is itself a Church, in the sense in which that word was originally used, for it represents the getting together of those who want to bring about the Kingdom of God.

The New Theology, as I understand it, is the theology of this movement, whether the movement knows it or not, for it is essentially the gospel of the Kingdom of God. No lesser theology can consistently claim to be this; systems of belief, which are weighted by dogmatic considerations, have not and cannot have the same power of appeal. This higher, wider truth, which sweeps away the mischievous accretions which have made religion distasteful to the masses, is the religious articulation of the movement towards an ideal social order. This fact ought to be realized and brought home to the consciousness of the earnest men who are labouring to redeem England and the

The New Theology and Collectivism.

world from the power of all that tortures and degrades humanity, and stifles or destroys its best life.

This, then, is the mission of the New Theology. It is to brighten and keep burning the flame of the spiritual ideal in the midst of the mighty social movement which is now in progress. It is ours to see God in it, and help mankind to see Him too. It is ours to show what the gospel really is and has been from the first. We shall not suffer the world any longer to believe that Christianity and dogma mean the same thing. Our business is to show that the religion of Jesus is primarily a gospel for this life and only secondarily for the life to come. We have to demonstrate that material things have spiritual meanings, and that wealth has value only as it ministers to soul power. We have to make clear to the world that the reason why we want to lift any man up and give him a chance of a better and happier life here is because he has an immortal destiny, and must make a beginning somewhere if he is to reach the stature of the perfect man at last. We believe that faith is the one indispensable qualification for this work, as for any work that is worth the doing, or ever has been worth the doing, in the history of mankind. It is the victory that overcometh the world.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

THE task which has occupied the greater part of my winter resting-time has now been accomplished, as far as opportunity affords. What has been said in these pages is no more than an outline statement of the teaching which has been given from the City Temple pulpit ever since I came into it. There is not a single thought in this book with which my own people are not already quite familiar, and chapter and verse for it can be produced from my published sermons, which have been appearing week by week for years past in the *Christian Commonwealth* and other periodicals.

A personal word.

Those critics who talk as though these views had been hastily formulated and thrust suddenly upon the general public are consciously or unconsciously stating what is not true. I notice that this criticism has occasionally been passed in a somewhat patronizing manner by persons who profess to hold liberal views themselves; the only answer to such a charge is to say that, even if it were true, they must stand or fall by their power to help and lift mankind, and not

by the length of time consumed in elaborating them. But it is not true, and to those who attend the City Temple it must seem absurd. Another favourite argument employed by would-be detractors is that the religious system set forth in these pages contains nothing which is either new or original, and therefore has no special value or significance. Indeed? Then what is all the fuss about? For weeks and months past assailants of these views have visited me with every kind of abuse as the exponent of them. People do not usually behave in this way unless they imagine something serious to be at stake, and I readily admit that the majority of my critics do believe the issue to be serious, and are inspired by loyalty to Christian truth which they have found precious in their individual experience. All I would now ask them to recognize is, that the truth is not the form, but something greater and more lasting than the form can ever be. Perhaps, too, if they will read this book carefully a second time they will discover that, as a system of thought, it has more claim to originality than some people have been willing to concede. Others, the most hostile of all its assailants, are more than ready to admit this, for their chief anxiety is to prove that no part of it ever existed in any mind but my own. Still, whatever may be said of details, I think it will be recognized that this is the first connected and systematic statement of the New Theology which has yet been made. In so far

as it coincides with any one else's views I am thankful, for it shows that the same eternal Spirit of truth is speaking to others than myself. It can hardly be denied that in its main bearing, to say no more, it is seen to be rising spontaneously in every part of the civilized world. No thinker can ever succeed in completely closing the circle of his system of thought, and I cannot claim to be an exception. But I trust it will be seen that what is contained in this book is at least a self-consistent whole; every arc of the circle implies every other.

If space had permitted I should like to have said much more, for necessarily many phases of the subject have had to be left untouched; it has only been possible to deal with those of fundamental importance. For example, I should like to have included some examination of the great question of Miracles, the place of Prayer in Christian experience, and the value and significance of Biblical Criticism. But as it has not been possible to do this, I must add a word or two to indicate my position in regard to these matters.

It seems probable that before long we shall see a rehabilitation of belief in the credibility of certain kinds of miracle, and that this rehabilitation will proceed from the side of psychical science. Already there are signs that this rehabilitation is on the way. The power of mind over matter is being recognized for therapeutic purposes, for instance, in a way hitherto undreamed of, and is receiving a

Miracle.

large and increasing measure of attention from the medical profession. This appears to me to throw a considerable amount of light upon the healing ministry of Jesus, which, as the late Professor A. B. Bruce has pointed out, rests upon as good historical ground as the best accredited parts of the teaching. Given a time and a mental atmosphere in which men expected miracles of this sort, and given a personality of such wonderful magnetic force as that of Jesus, such miracles would be sure to happen. That they did not happen apart from such conditions is evident from such hints as the statement that, "He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief." There are other kinds of miracle recorded in Scripture which are not so easily credible, but I am not prepared to brush them aside as mere childish fancies. As a rule, it will be found that they belong to the poetry of religious experience, and that some valuable truth is contained in this particular form of statement. To this order belong the accounts about the horses and chariots of fire on the hill-side round about Elisha, the whirlwind in which Elijah ascended to heaven, and Jesus walking on the sea. These accounts are forms in which the Oriental imagination is, even to-day, wont to clothe truths too great for prosaic statement; they are poetry, not history, and the Western mind ought to make allowance for the fact. Sometimes we can discern in Scripture records of an event, which to the stolid Western imagination

seems utterly incredible, a genuine historical truth. Such, for instance, are the passage of the Red Sea—a stirring and dramatic incident, thoroughly well told—and Joshua commanding the sun and moon to stand still. In the latter case we have two lines of poetry from a book which has been lost, and a comparison with similar poetry in almost any literature gives us a clue to its meaning. The poet represents the old warrior as declaring in magnificent style that the sun of Israel shall not go down, and that day and night shall be alike to him until her enemies are discomfited. Any reader with a shred of sympathetic imagination ought to be able to feel the force of the sentiment which provoked this utterance, without either accepting or rejecting it as a literal statement of fact; the best things which have been written in the books of the world are seldom literal and exact statements of fact. It has been well pointed out that myth and legend are truer than history, for they take us to the inside of things, whereas history only shows us the outside.

Prayer is a vital necessity to religious experience, and without it no religious experience has ever existed, or ever can. It is not primarily petition but communion with God. Our intercourse with our friends does not chiefly consist in asking them for things! But when communion does become petition there is a real place for it, as well as for the answer to such prayer. It is not too

Prayer.

much to say that no true prayer has ever gone without its answer. This is quite consistent with the assertion that prayer does not change God; it only affords Him opportunity. It is impossible to improve on what God already desires for us before we pray, but upon our prayer depends the realization of that desire. Everything that the soul can possibly need is present beforehand in the eternal reality, and the prayer of faith is like going into a treasure-house and bringing forth from what is contained therein all that the soul needs day by day. Prayer therefore cannot be too definite, but it should be as unselfish as the worshipper can make it, in order that the highest can operate in response. The same law holds good in this as in all other activities of the soul; selfishness draws away from the source of life, whereas love is instantly at one with infinity. I question whether many people realize the enormous value of definite and systematic prayer; it is the secret of all spiritual power. Everything that we can possibly want is waiting for us in the bounty of God, and what we have to do is to go and take it. "Believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."

The Bible and the young.

One thing that urgently needs to be done for the young people in our Sunday schools and various Christian societies all over the world is to issue a series of well-written popular manuals presenting in succinct form the best results of Biblical Criticism.

The way the Bible is taught to young people at present is most regrettable, for in after years it leads them to doubt and distrust the very foundations of Christianity. If the teachers only had a little more intelligent acquaintance with the sources of the Scriptures this danger would be avoided, and the Bible would become a far more interesting and helpful book both to young and old. At present it is interpreted by many people in a way which is an insult to the intelligence and harmful to the moral sense. Will any one seriously maintain that the trickeries of Jacob, and the butcheries following the Israelitish invasion of Canaan, not to speak of the obscenities which are to be found in so many parts of the Old Testament, are healthy reading for children or a mark of Divine inspiration? Is it not time we adopted the more excellent way of facing the truth about the Bible records, and presenting what is valuable in such a way as to help and not to hinder the growth of a true knowledge of the relations of God and man?

It only remains to reiterate my conviction that the movement represented by the New Theology is only incidentally theological at all; it is primarily a moral and spiritual movement. It is one symptom of a great religious awakening which in the end will reinspire civilization with a living faith in God and the spiritual meaning of life. If what I am trying to do can contribute in any way towards this grand result, I shall be humbly thankful to the Giver of all good.

And if, in the reading of these pages, any one should feel hurt or aggrieved by the views expressed, I now ask him to believe that it is far from my intention to cause pain. My interest in theology is only secondary; my chief interest is mankind. To quote the words of the late Mr. Gladstone, I think of Jesus as "the one central hope for our poor wayward race." Will those who agree with me in this—and surely that must mean the vast majority of the readers of this book—pardon all shortcomings for the sake of Him Who is our common Lord? "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

THE END

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